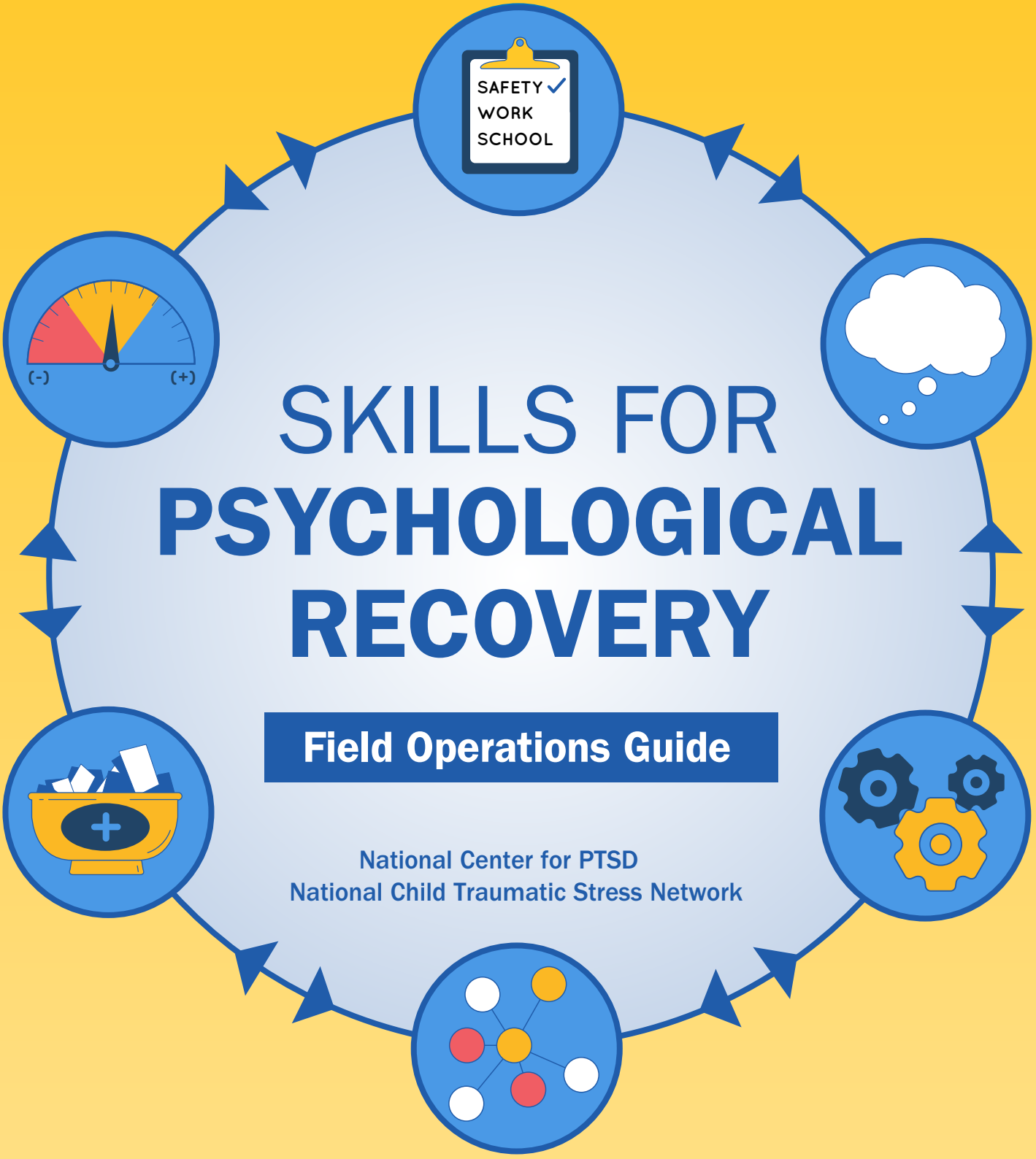

SKILLS FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL RECOVERY

Field Operations Guide

National Center for PTSD
National Child Traumatic Stress Network

This work was funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

National Center for PTSD
Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

NCTSN The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

A Life in the Community for Everyone
SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

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National Center for PTSD

VA's National Center for PTSD is a world leader in research and education programs focusing on PTSD and other psychological and medical consequences of traumatic stress. Mandated by Congress in 1989, the Center is a consortium of seven academic centers of excellence providing research, education, and consultation in the field of traumatic stress.

National Child Traumatic Stress Network

Established by Congress in 2000, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) is a unique collaboration of academic and community-based service centers whose mission is to raise the standard of care and increase access to services for traumatized children and their families across the United States. Combining knowledge of child development, expertise in the full range of child traumatic experiences, and attention to cultural perspectives, the NCTSN serves as a national resource for developing and disseminating evidence-based interventions, trauma-informed services, and public and professional education.

The views, opinions, and content are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of SAMHSA or HHS.

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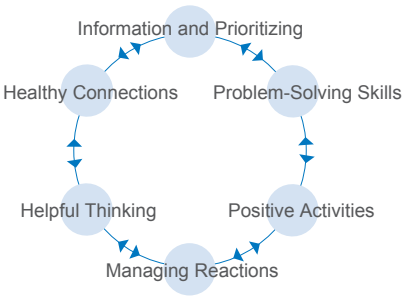

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The principal authors (in alphabetical order) include: Steve Berkowitz, M.D., Richard Bryant, Ph.D., Melissa Brymer, Ph.D., Psy.D., Jessica Hamblen, Ph.D., Anne Jacobs, Ph.D., Christopher Layne, Ph.D., Robert Macy, Ph.D., Howard Osofsky, M.D., Ph.D., Robert Pynoos, M.D., M.P.H., Josef Ruzek, Ph.D., Alan Steinberg, Ph.D., Eric Vernberg, Ph.D., and Patricia Watson, Ph.D.

Editorial contributions to the manual were made by: Mark Creamer, Ph.D., David Forbes, Ph.D., Darryl Wade, Ph.D., and Susie Burke, Ph.D., of the Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health at the University of Melbourne, and Cynthia Whitham, L.C.S.W. of the National Center for Child Traumatic Stress, UCLA.

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Joan Asarnow, Ph.D., Nikki Bellamy, Ph.D., Dave Benedek, M.D., Charles C. Benight, Ph.D., Paul Brounstein, Ph.D., Brenda Bruun, Denise Bulling, Ph.D., L.P.C., Victoria Childs, Steven Crimando, M.A., B.C.E.T.S., Darin Donato, Ph.D., Julie Framingham, Rachel Kaul, L.C.S.W., C.T.S., Linda Ligenza, M.S.W., A.C.S.W., Brian McKernan, M.Ed., A.C.A.D.C., Gil Reyes, Ph.D., Tony Speier, Ph.D.

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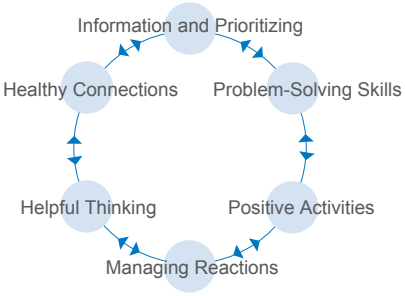
Introduction and Overview



Individuals affected by a disaster or traumatic incident, whether survivors, witnesses, or responders to such events, may struggle with or face new challenges in the weeks and months following the event. Although some individuals will need referral for treatment, most individuals can benefit from several skills-building contacts. *Skills for Psychological Recovery* (SPR) was derived from a review of the literature on traumatic stress interventions, lessons learned from the disaster field, and field-testing in post-disaster settings. The SPR skill sets are designed to be helpful in addressing the survivors' and responders' needs and concerns. These interventions have had good results following individual as well as group traumas, including disasters and acts of terrorism. They are also in alignment with the literature on improving resilience and facilitating recovery of function following traumatic stress.

What is *Skills for Psychological Recovery*?

Skills for Psychological Recovery (SPR) is an evidence-informed modular approach to help children, adolescents, adults, and families in the weeks and months following disaster and trauma, after the period where Psychological First Aid (PFA) has been utilized (for more information on PFA, see www.nctsn.org or www.ncptsd.va.gov), or when more intensive intervention than PFA is needed. SPR is designed to help survivors gain skills to reduce ongoing distress and effectively cope with post-disaster stresses and adversities. SPR is based on an understanding that disaster survivors will experience a broad range of reactions (physical, psychological, behavioral, spiritual) over differing periods of time. While many survivors will recover on their own, some will experience distressing reactions that interfere with adaptive coping. Compassionate, caring, and informed providers may help these survivors recover by introducing them to the applicable SPR skills.

The principles and techniques of SPR meet four basic standards:

1. Consistent with research evidence on risk and resilience following trauma
2. Applicable and practical in field settings
3. Appropriate for developmental levels across the lifespan
4. Culturally informed

SPR is a skills-training intervention designed to accelerate recovery and increase self-efficacy. SPR utilizes several core skill sets that have been found helpful in a variety of post-trauma situations. Research suggests that a skills-building approach is more effective than supportive counseling. SPR differs from mental health

treatment in that it does not assume pathology, but places emphasis on helping the survivor regain a sense of control and competence. While SPR was not designed to address severe psychopathology, it may be augmented by specific services that do so.

How Long Will SPR Take?

SPR takes into consideration the reality that many survivors may only be available for one or two contacts. Expert consensus suggests that survivors need a minimum of three to five sessions of skills-building to reliably change behavior. However, SPR can be delivered in single, stand-alone contacts when more contacts are not practical, and this can also be beneficial. When introducing SPR to survivors, providers should clearly state that they advise more than one contact.

The number of contacts of SPR also depends on when SPR is initiated. SPR delivered four weeks after the event is likely to be very different than if delivered 18 months post-event. At the first meeting, you will assess what is going on in the survivor's life at the time, and how much energy and time the survivor has to learn new skills. Also, the survivor's need to avoid certain reminders of the event will be different in the early (compared with the later) phases of recovery. Your decision whether or not to challenge the survivor's avoidance and encourage facing his/her fears will depend on how much time has passed since the event. Finally, how you decide which skills to teach may vary with the timeframe. For example, you are more likely to choose practical problem-solving early on and focus on helpful thinking and positive activities later.

What Are the Basic Goals and Objectives of SPR?

The goals of SPR are to:

1. Protect the mental health of disaster survivors
2. Enhance survivors' abilities to address their needs and concerns
3. Teach skills to promote the recovery of children, adolescents, adults, and families
4. Prevent maladaptive behaviors while identifying and supporting adaptive behaviors

You can accomplish these goals by first identifying and prioritizing a survivor's needs, and then helping him/her to learn SPR's core skills:

- **Building Problem-Solving Skills** – A method to define a problem and goal, brainstorm a number of ways to solve it, evaluate those ways, then try out the solution that seems most likely to help
- **Promoting Positive Activities** – A way to improve mood and functioning by identifying and engaging in positive and pleasurable activities
- **Managing Reactions** – Skills to cope with and reduce distressing physical and emotional reactions to upsetting situations
- **Promoting Helpful Thinking** – Steps to identify upsetting thoughts and to counter these thoughts with less upsetting ones

- **Rebuilding Healthy Social Connections** – A way to rebuild positive relationships and community supports

These goals and objectives are built on a number of core foundational tenets. Any intervention that seeks to impart new skills is more challenging than simply listening and supporting the survivor. Therefore, SPR must be provided in the context of a strong rapport that includes validation, support, and emotional comfort. If this is the foundation of the relationship, SPR will be delivered in a non-intrusive, compassionate manner. Once this type of relationship is established, the provider will aim to:

- Help survivors identify their most pressing needs and concerns and gather additional information as appropriate to guide their actions
- Support adaptive coping, acknowledge coping efforts and strengths, and empower survivors
- Encourage survivors to take an active role in their recovery
- Teach a set of skills that will help survivors to reduce distress and improve functioning
- Link survivors, when needed, to local recovery systems, mental health services, public-sector services, and other organizations

How is SPR Different from PFA?

SPR is intended to provide psychological assistance to survivors of disasters and traumatic events after the initial crisis has subsided—in the recovery phase. Alternatively, PFA is intended to provide disaster survivors with assistance in the days to weeks after a disaster—in the immediate response and the initial period of the recovery phase. The delivery of PFA is defined in terms of days or weeks after a disaster because the timing will depend on the circumstances of the post-disaster setting. SPR is intended to assist disaster survivors after safety, security, and other vital and immediate needs have been met and when the community is rebuilding. In some cases, SPR may be delivered one week after a disaster, as a follow up to the initial PFA response, and in other cases, it may be appropriate to provide this assistance weeks, months, or even years after a major event. The timing will be partially dependent on how devastating the disaster was to community resources and infrastructure.

SPR places greater emphasis than PFA on teaching specific skills to meet survivor needs, as well as on follow up to reinforce the use of SPR skills. PFA, in contrast, is often delivered in temporary settings where follow up may not be possible.

How is SPR Different from Formal Mental Health Treatment?

SPR is not meant to be formal mental health treatment; it is rather meant to be a secondary prevention model. In other words, it is an intermediate intervention designed to reduce distress, identify existing coping skills, improve functioning, and potentially lower the need for formal mental health treatment. As a provider of SPR, you take on an active role in teaching the appropriate SPR skills and reinforcing their use. For many people, SPR will be all the help they need. However, if SPR does not help to alleviate distress as effectively as needed, providers can refer survivors for more intensive mental health intervention. While helping survivors

make the transition to other services, you may be able to address one or more areas of concern. Additionally, if serious mental health issues are revealed in the initial assessment, you must immediately refer the survivor to the appropriate service.

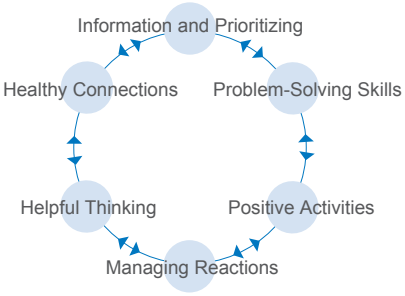
Who Delivers SPR?

SPR is designed for delivery by mental health and other health workers who provide ongoing support and assistance to affected children, families, and adults as part of an organized disaster response effort. Providers must have completed a basic credentialing course, and ideally should have had some prior experience in addressing traumatic stress or in disaster response. These providers may be embedded in a variety of settings and services, including emergency or crisis counseling programs, community mental health, primary health care, school mental health, faith-based organizations, community recovery programs, national and international nonprofit agencies, and other disaster-related organizations that provide recovery services in the intermediate post-disaster phase.

Where Can SPR Be Used?

SPR can be provided in a clinic, school, family assistance center, home, business, refugee resettlement camp, house of worship, or other community setting that ensures the privacy of survivors. SPR is best provided in a private, quiet place that allows for at least 45 minutes of uninterrupted time. If you are providing mobile services, make sure survivors have a way to contact you for follow-up visits, as multiple contacts are encouraged.

Delivery Considerations



Preparing to Deliver SPR

Preparation and practice allow providers of SPR to feel more competent in a number of areas, including how to:

- Develop a strong rapport with the survivor as a foundation for teaching SPR skills
- Gather information about survivors' reactions, needs, and resources
- Teach the core SPR skill sets to survivors
- Decide how and when to teach the specific skills
- Tailor the skills to address survivors' specific concerns
- Strategize ways to support the survivor to engage in more than one SPR session

You may be working with children, older adults, and special populations, and this will require you to have additional in-depth knowledge.

In order to be of assistance to disaster-affected communities, you need to have a basic understanding of the nature of the event, affected populations, immediate circumstances, and the type and availability of relief and support services.

The Importance of the Provider-Survivor Relationship

In order for SPR to be accepted by and helpful to survivors, you must build a positive, collaborative relationship. Because this manual focuses on teaching specific skills in recovery, which can be challenging to both the provider and the survivor, it is especially important that you remain empathic, build trust, show respect, and communicate effectively.

Your goal is to respond to survivors in a compassionate and helpful manner. You should:

- Establish a practical, skills-oriented approach in an efficient, focused manner
- Prepare individuals to tolerate changing circumstances
- Practice active listening, validate concerns, and demonstrate empathy

- Foster perseverance and motivation
- Identify and strengthen existing positive traits, and enhance existing skills with new coping skills

You will begin by explaining the underlying rationale for each of the skills to survivors. Then, you and the survivor should decide together which skills to focus on. You will select the skills that meet the survivor's specific needs, rather than teaching all of the skills to every survivor. You will want to have an open, honest exchange so that the survivor gets as much out of your time together as possible. By being respectful and compassionate, you can establish an effective working relationship and increase the survivor's receptiveness to further help. Be sure not to rush through teaching a skill. Work at the survivor's pace and review the steps of the skill when needed. If you can only meet once, even one well-focused contact where you thoroughly review each step of a skill can help someone who is feeling overwhelmed or frustrated. If an individual declines more than one contact, respect his/her decision and indicate when and where to contact you or another provider later on, if needed.

In the process of introducing SPR to the survivor, describe the intervention, how it differs from supportive counseling or treatment, and the goals. Do this in a collaborative, engaging manner. By acknowledging even one coping strategy that the survivor is already using (like having the courage to speak with you) you will give the survivor the sense that together you are embarking on a mission to help him/her more effectively cope with his/her concerns, and that you will work as partners to tackle his/her needs. You may say:

Introduction: Adults	I'm glad you are here today. I'd like to describe how we might work together today and in the future. You may have already seen a counselor, but I'm going to be more like a teacher or a coach. I'm going to help you learn a set of skills that have been found to help people after difficult events in their life—like tools in a toolbox. First, we'll figure out together what are your most pressing needs and concerns. Then I'll introduce the skills, and you'll choose which skill you think will make things better. You'll also decide how much time you have to learn those skills—so you're in charge. I hope we can meet more than once, so we can check in on how you're doing and fine-tune your skills. I've found that practice and trying out the skills in different ways with a chance to check in about how you're doing usually helps a lot. How does that sound?

Introduction: Children	I'm glad you are here today. I'm like a teacher or a coach and, because of what you've been through, I'm going to teach you new ways to help your body be more relaxed, to feel stronger, and to have more fun again. First, I want to learn more about you and how you've been, and then we can start learning together!

The Importance of Setting Expectations

For You:

Helping someone learn SPR skills takes practice and regular monitoring of both his/her progress and comfort with the skills, as well as your own. Be careful that you do not avoid teaching one skill because you feel more

confident teaching another (i.e., you hesitate to teach problem-solving because you are more comfortable teaching controlled breathing). Keep in mind, too, that you can accomplish only so much with a time-limited intervention. While you may want to teach several skills to the survivor, if you only meet once or twice, you and the survivor will have to choose among them. When teaching a skill, make sure that you cover each step thoroughly and that the survivor understands and practices each step. Do not rush through the steps or leave any step out. Do not pressure yourself to create significant changes in the survivor's life in only a couple of sessions. While it is possible to set some survivors on an upward course in a short time, others may need more lengthy and/or intensive intervention to improve their functioning and decrease their distress. With these individuals, if you do not see a difference in their functioning or distress level over the course of your work together, you will want to refer them to a mental health professional in their community.

For the Survivor:

Give a realistic picture of what SPR can and cannot accomplish, explaining both its strengths and limitations. Tell the survivor that while SPR has more tools or skills to offer than other counseling, you won't be providing the full range of interventions that you would in formal mental health treatment. You can maximize survivors' chances for success by encouraging them to try out the skills in a focused, experimental way, at different times and in different places, to see where and when the skill works best for them. You might say, "You and I are only going to meet a few times, so we'll make the most of our time by choosing skills to meet your top priorities. However, it is your decision when and how to use these skills in your daily life, and the more you practice them, the more success you can expect to have."

SPR providers must create a supportive and empathic partnership, so that the survivor will be comfortable with learning new skills and able to:

- Keep going under difficult circumstances
- Maintain and improve on already existing strengths
- Become "unstuck" and do things more efficiently
- Feel comfortable reporting difficulties and challenges
- Ask for help
- Decrease and try to eliminate doing things that could be destructive or unhealthy

The Importance of a Developmental Perspective

As with other forms of psychological assistance, you should consider the developmental level of survivors. People of all ages are affected by disasters and can experience psychological effects (e.g., fears of recurrence, heightened sensitivity to trauma reminders). Survivors in certain age groups may have other psychological responses (e.g., increased separation anxiety between children and their parents, greater difficulty recovering from loss of resources in older adults). The ability of survivors to understand and use the skills presented in this manual depends, in part, on their developmental level. To be helpful for people across the lifespan, you will need to tailor SPR to meet the needs and abilities of people of different ages. To this end, the SPR manual provides you with activities and scripts tailored for children as well as adults.

The Importance of Cultural Sensitivity

You must be sensitive to cultural, ethnic, religious, racial, and language diversity in order to deliver SPR successfully. Whether providing outreach or services, be aware of your own values and prejudices and how these may agree with or differ from those of the community you are serving. Be mindful not only of how you see people of different cultures, but also of how they may see you. Consider training in cultural competence to deepen your awareness. When you help survivors maintain or reestablish their customs, traditions, rituals, family structure, gender roles, and social bonds, you enhance their ability to cope with the impact of a disaster. Learn from community leaders—who best represent and understand local groups—how the residents express emotions or might react under the circumstances, how they feel about governmental agencies, and how receptive they might be to assistance. It is impossible to know everything about every culture and what cultural practices each family or individual uses. Another way to learn more is to ask your co-workers or the survivors themselves about their culture.

Things to Consider

1. **How many contacts should I plan?** The number of meetings you have with a survivor will depend on many factors. You'll consider how motivated the survivor is, how much time he/she has for SPR contacts, how well the SPR skills are working, how helpful you think the SPR skills are for his/her presenting problems, and what other resources are available in the community. When deciding how many contacts to schedule, do not plan too much for each visit. Teach one skill well and leave the door open for future contact; don't overload the survivor. Be practical and focus on one skill at a time. When planning visits, keep in mind that you may not get another meeting with the survivor. See the section on Multiple Contacts for more information on how to select skills to work on, how to improve motivation, and how to prevent setbacks.

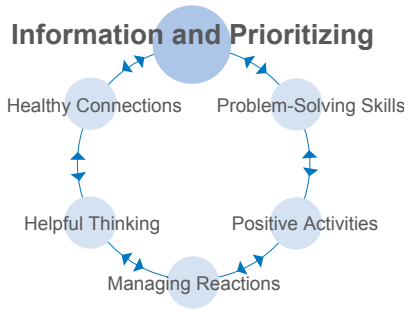
   A general rule of thumb is that the more SPR skills you can teach an individual, and the more often he/she can use them under your guidance, the better the outcome will be. If an individual identifies a significant problem, try to schedule at least five contacts, so that he/she has time to learn and master the needed skills.

2. **Should I deliver SPR in an individual or group setting?** You can deliver SPR in individual meetings, in small groups, or in family gatherings. Group classes are more efficient and promote mutual support among members. Individual visits allow you to focus specifically on a survivor's needs and offer more time for practice. Keep in mind that this is not group treatment. You are using a group setting to teach the specific skills of this intervention. You will need to strike a balance between teaching strategies to address the individual's needs and ensuring that classes remain relevant to all group members.

3. **Do I have parent permission?** When making contact with children, first meet with the parents or guardians to explain your role and obtain their permission. If the survivor is an adolescent, consider getting permission from him/her with their parent(s) present.

4. **Is the survivor a candidate for SPR?** SPR may be inappropriate for some people. You should immediately refer survivors who are actively suicidal, a danger to others, gravely disabled, acutely psychotic, or who have severe cognitive disabilities. Refer survivors who complain of physical symptoms to a medical professional before proceeding with SPR.

Skill 1:
Gathering Information and Prioritizing Assistance



Goal	To gather information to determine if there is a need for immediate referral within your agency or to other services, to understand the survivor's most pressing needs and concerns, and to prioritize and plan SPR intervention strategies
Rationale	In the post-disaster period, survivors often deal with ongoing distress due to their disaster experiences and losses. They may need assistance with immediate or long-term medical or mental health conditions, be faced with a range of hardships and adversities, have concerns about safety, and experience difficulties in interpersonal and role functioning. Gathering information is the first step in assisting survivors to identify and prioritize their current needs and concerns in order to address them.
Use for	All survivors who are making initial contact or returning after a break in services
Time	10-15 Minutes
Materials	*SPR Screening Form* *SPR Skill Flowchart* *What Is Skills for Psychological Recovery?*
Skill Steps	After Explaining the Rationale for Information Gathering: **1.** Identify Current Needs and Concerns **2.** Prioritize Areas to Address **3.** Make an Action Plan

Explain the Rationale for Information Gathering

Gathering information and prioritizing assistance are the crucial first steps in using SPR with survivors. After greeting the survivor, introduce the idea of identifying and prioritizing the survivor's current needs and concerns, as follows:

Rationale	To find out how I can best help you, may I ask you a few questions? If we identify the areas most important to you, then we can work together to address your most pressing concerns. I'll also ask how big each problem is for you now. But first, is there something you are really concerned about right now, that we should talk about first?

Then explain that you will be asking a few brief questions in order to determine:

- The need for immediate referral or referral for other services
- The survivor's practical needs and concerns
- The survivor's priorities for assistance

Provider Alert

The primary goal of SPR is to use the time available to most efficiently help survivors address their current needs and concerns. SPR is a problem- and solution-focused intervention. You may have only one meeting with the survivor, so tailor the time to gather as much information and provide as much assistance as possible. In most cases, information gathering should be no longer than 10-15 minutes.

If you determine that the survivor chooses or requires a different type of provider due to his/her cultural background (gender, age, ethnicity, religion), then use this to determine what type of provider would best serve his/her needs.

Step 1: Identify Current Needs and Concerns

Most survivors will be able to report the needs for which they require primary assistance. Respond to these issues without further exploration. Some survivors, however, may have difficulty articulating their needs and will respond better with additional direct questions. Use the questions provided in the *SPR Screening Form* (Appendix A) or your agency's screening and referral tool to guide information gathering. For each area in which the survivor identifies a concern, ask him/her how much of a problem it poses ("Is it an urgent problem—an emergency—or can it wait until we deal with some of your other concerns?").

If the survivor reports a concern that requires immediate attention, postpone screening and attend to the issue immediately. This often will require referral to an agency in your community. These problems may include physical health issues, mental health issues (such as mood, anxiety, substance abuse, suicidal or homicidal ideation/threat), and immediate safety needs.

Step 2: Prioritize Areas to Address

After completing the screening, you should be able to:

- Prioritize needs and concerns
- Select SPR skills to address these problems
- Discuss the number of meetings that may be needed or that are possible to hold

Review with the survivor what you have discussed, share your understanding of needs and concerns, and decide together the most important area to tackle first. Remember to give survivors adequate time to ask questions and share their views. You may summarize what has been discussed by saying:

Summary	We've talked about a number of things. Let me try to summarize what we've said. It sounds like your major concerns right now are_____. Have I got that right?

Ask the survivor which concern is most important at present and which he/she would like to address. Use the *SPR Screening Form* to help the survivor prioritize. You may also share your personal observations and recommendations with the goal of jointly deciding on the most important issues to address. For example, you may say:

Recommendations	Based on our conversation, it sounds like it might be most useful to focus first on _____. Then, if you would like, we could meet again to talk more about this issue and the other problems. How does that sound to you?

If the survivor identifies several high priority areas, help him/her decide which to work on first. You may say:

Prioritizing	We have found a few important areas that we can address. In order to help choose one that we can work on today, let me ask you: • Which one of these areas is bothering you the most? • Is there one that we really need to deal with sooner than the other ones? • Is there one problem that seems to be getting worse? • Is there a particular problem that, if I can help you with it, might also help with some of the other problems? • Is there one area that you would feel most comfortable working on or have the strength to tackle today? • Is there some event coming up that might make things difficult for you that we should address first? • Is there anything that has happened recently that made things worse and that it would be helpful to address? Taking all of this into account, which area would you prefer us to work on today?

To help decide which problems to focus on, consider the following:

- The survivor identifies the problem as a major one
- The problem is causing serious distress or impairment
- The problem needs to be addressed sooner than other problems
- The problem is worsening over time
- Addressing the problem will reduce other problems
- The survivor prefers help with this problem first
- The survivor feels he/she has the strength to work on this problem now
- The problem can be addressed by SPR skills

Step 3: Make an Action Plan

Determine whether you can address the problem using SPR skills, or if the survivor needs a referral for additional services. As stated above, be sure to attend to any urgent medical or mental health concerns immediately.

Next, decide together which SPR strategy to use first. Briefly review the SPR skill options for the identified problem and find out about the survivor's preference. For example, you may say:

Choosing a Strategy	In the time we have today, we have agreed to work on _____. There are several ways to do this. For example, we can work on ***(explain the SPR skill options from the list below)***. Have you had experience with any of these? Does one sound more comfortable? Which one do you prefer that we use first?

Explain the SPR skills as follows:

- **Building Problem-Solving Skills** – A method to define a problem and goal, brainstorm a number of ways to solve it, evaluate those ways, then try out the solution that seems most likely to help
- **Promoting Positive Activities** – A way to improve mood and functioning by identifying and engaging in positive and pleasurable activities
- **Managing Reactions** – Skills to cope with and reduce distressing physical and emotional reactions to upsetting situations
- **Promoting Helpful Thinking** – Steps to identify upsetting thoughts and to counter these thoughts with less upsetting ones
- **Rebuilding Healthy Social Connections** – A way to rebuild positive relationships and community supports

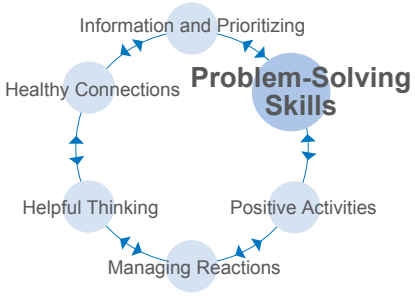
Use the *SPR Skill Flowchart* below to identify the appropriate SPR interventions for different problem areas.

If the problems warrant it, recommend more than one meeting, and discuss whether this is possible. Explain that the survivor is always free to discontinue services at any time.

SPR SKILL FLOWCHART

CONCERN	PRIMARY SPR SKILL	SECONDARY SPR SKILL
Having a difficult problem that I need to solve.	PROBLEM-SOLVING	HEALTHY SOCIAL CONNECTIONS HELPFUL THINKING
Having intense or repeatedly upsetting reactions to things that happen.	MANAGING REACTIONS	HEALTHY SOCIAL CONNECTIONS HELPFUL THINKING
Not knowing how to connect or re-connect with friends and family after the disaster. Not having enough people that care about me or can help me out.	HEALTHY SOCIAL CONNECTIONS	POSITIVE ACTIVITIES HELPFUL THINKING
Feeling depressed, sad, or withdrawn.	POSITIVE ACTIVITIES	PROBLEM-SOLVING HEALTHY SOCIAL CONNECTIONS
Having upsetting thoughts that make me feel bad or stop me from having more positive thoughts.	HELPFUL THINKING	MANAGING REACTIONS ACTIVITY SCHEDULING
Having a serious physical health problem, a serious mental health condition, a serious substance abuse problem, significant current hardships and adversities.	PROBLEM-SOLVING (with a focus on referral to the appropriate services)	HEALTHY SOCIAL CONNECTIONS HELPFUL THINKING

Skill 2:
Building Problem-Solving Skills



Goal	Help survivors to prioritize and solve difficulties or problems
Rationale	Disasters often create many difficulties that can make survivors feel helpless or even immobilized in the face of numerous problems. Ongoing stress and pressures to "do something" can make it hard to step back and think effectively about the best way to handle a situation. Having a systematic way to solve problems can help survivors address problems more effectively, regain a sense of control, and increase their self-efficacy.
Use for	Survivors who identify concerns about: • Feeling overwhelmed or immobilized by multiple problems • Feeling helpless to come up with solutions that can solve their problems • Feeling demoralized or lacking control over their situation • Family members who are having difficulty solving problems
Time	30-45 Minutes
Handouts	Adults: *Problem-Solving Worksheet* Children: *For Children: Problem Busters Worksheet*
Skill Steps	After Explaining the Rationale for Problem-Solving: **1.** Define the Problem/Decide Ownership **2.** Set the Goal **3.** Brainstorm **4.** Evaluate and Choose the Best Solutions

Explain the Rationale for Problem-Solving

Ongoing problems can lead to increased stress, cause negative mood, and negatively affect relationships with others (e.g., increased anger). The inability to solve problems could lead to people feeling hopeless and demoralized. Problem-solving allows survivors to break problems down into manageable chunks, helps them to decide which to work on first, and allows them to thoughtfully select the action to take. To introduce this skill, you might say:

Rationale	A disaster creates so many difficulties that survivors often feel bad or helpless in the face of the many challenges. Today, we will discuss some steps that you can use to tackle your problems successfully. This approach allows you to think of a number of solutions to one problem, so you have a choice of what to do.

For those who express concern about family members having difficulties solving problems, explain that survivors can teach this skill to others and that you will provide a handout that describes each of the steps. However, say that before they can teach it to their loved ones, they should practice the skill themselves. Offer to meet with family members individually or together.

Next, have them identify a problem to work on. You can then say:

Identifying a Problem	I'm going to teach you a simple four-step way to tackle any problem that you want. If you use it, you can cut problems down to a manageable size. To show you how it works, let's tackle your problem using the four steps. While we come up with some things you can do to work on that problem, at the same time you'll be learning a tool that you can use for any other kind of problem that you're facing. Any questions? OK, the four steps are: (1) Define the Problem and Decide Ownership, (2) Set the Goal, (3) Brainstorm, and (4) Evaluate and Choose the Best Solutions. [Hand the survivor the *Problem-Solving Worksheet*] Now we'll work through the steps of problem-solving.

Step 1: Define the Problem/Decide Ownership

Define the Problem

To help define the problem and engage in problem-solving, use the *Problem-Solving Worksheets* in Appendix B. Have the survivor clearly define what he/she wants to work on in as much detail, and as concretely, as possible. Ask as many questions as you need to understand enough about the problem to decide if it is a good choice for problem-solving. As you help the survivor to be specific, you'll soon know whether to work on that problem or to choose another one. You might say:

Defining a Problem	The first step in problem-solving is to define the problem that you want to work on as clearly as possible. If your problem is complex, let's see if we can break it down into manageable chunks. Often, what seems like a big problem (e.g., your family is not getting along) can be broken down into smaller problems that are easier to solve, such as identifying what the family is arguing about. It may be something like not having enough money to do family activities or who gets to take their shower first in the morning. Take the time to be specific, as the more specific the "chunk," the more workable it will be. When you have broken one problem into two or three "chunks," don't worry that you might not solve all parts of the problem. The key is to stay focused on one part at a time and not get sidetracked by your other "chunks" and other problems. You can deal with each problem later in the same way. OK, take a minute and write down your problem as specifically as possible on the worksheet.

Alternative method for children:

Some children have difficulty prioritizing their problems or clarifying their problems concretely. To help, have the child make a list of his/her concerns or problems. As the child mentions each problem/adversity, explore the problem with probes such as the following:

- How often does it happen?
- Who is involved?
- How does it make you feel?
- How does it affect you?

Clarify each problem. Write the simplified version on an index card (e.g., "Fighting with my friends" or "No privacy at home because we live in a small trailer"). Ask the child to sort the cards (Q-Sort Technique) from the most to the least distressing and/or urgent. Make sure the most difficult problem is on the top and the problem on each card underneath decreases in severity. Choose the problem on top of the stack to work on first. (To help establish rapport with a child, start this exercise by having the child identify things that he/she is good at and prioritize them. Then have him/her identify the concerns or problems.)

Decide Ownership

Many survivors, particularly children, take on problems that are not theirs to fix. For example, a survivor will notice that a loved one is sad, irritable, or distracted and may assume that he/she is to blame and is the only person who can help the loved one. (If the survivor rightfully "owns" the problem he/she has selected, skip this part of Step 1.)

Teach the survivor how to determine when a problem is or is not his/her job to fix by asking if the problem is happening between him/her and someone else (e.g., fighting with loved one). If so, then it is—at least partly—his/her job to fix it. If the problem is mainly happening to someone else (e.g., a loved one is depressed) or between other people (e.g., friends are fighting more) then it is not up to the survivor to fix it. This does not

mean that he/she shouldn't be helpful to others (e.g., agree to babysit children so friends can look for a job). It means that he/she should not take on primary responsibility for the problem.

If the survivor has chosen a problem that belongs to someone else, have him/her pick a new one to work on. To help decide ownership, you can say:

Deciding Ownership	Now that you have decided on a problem to work on, let's see if this is a problem for you to fix or a problem that someone else should fix. To find out, answer the following questions: "Is this something that is happening to me or between me and someone else?" Or "Is this problem mainly happening to someone else or between other people?" If the problem is someone else's to fix, say, "While I know you are very concerned, it sounds like this is a problem for the other person to work out. Let's look at your next most important problem and write it down on the worksheet."

Step 2: Set the Goal

Have the survivor clarify what he/she wants and needs, and also what he/she fears or is concerned about. Many survivors are able to identify problems easily, but have not thought through what they need or want to happen, and what they are worried about. Identifying the underlying concerns enables them to solve the problem more effectively. Prefacing their statements with "I want," "I need," "I am afraid that," and "I am concerned that" can be helpful.

The more specific survivors are about their goals, the easier it will be to identify practical steps toward a solution. Encourage them to move beyond the superficial to the deeper needs and concerns that they have. There are several common concerns that underlie most problems (e.g., such as feeling in control, being recognized or acknowledged, feeling safe and secure, being liked and treated respectfully, being taken seriously, and developing one's potential). For example, if a survivor says that her house is too cramped, you may have to look beyond the stated problem to identify what she really needs (e.g., "I need to have more alone time" and "I need to have more privacy"), as the family cannot consider moving.

In helping to identify the goal, you may say:

Setting the Goal	Step 2 is setting the goal. You defined a problem you want to work on. Now you need to decide what you really want to happen or to be different, or what you're concerned about. For example, let's take the problem of the family arguing. In Step 1, we broke the big problem into two parts, arguments about not having enough money to do family activities and arguments about who gets to take their shower first in the morning. In Step 2, you identify your needs, wants, fears, and concerns. For the first part of the problem, you might identify things such as "I want to have a

Setting the Goal (cont.)	bathroom schedule that everyone is happy with," "I want to enjoy my shower," "I want to have a less stressful morning," and "I want enough time to get ready in the morning." For the second part of the problem, you might think "I want to spend time doing family activities," "I want to find family activities that are low cost or free," "I want us all to enjoy some family time," and "I am concerned about having enough money." Notice that the tasks of first breaking the problem down into manageable chunks, and next spending time thinking about a realistic goal, have actually led us closer to solving the problem. The problem is starting to feel more manageable. So, now let's go back to your problem. Let's explore what needs and concerns you have so that we can identify a goal. [You should help the survivor identify his/her concerns in a way that is concrete.] OK, take a minute and write down your goal on the worksheet.

Step 3: Brainstorm

Have the survivor come up with a number of possible options for meeting the goal. Brainstorming means spontaneously coming up with as many options as you can for solving the problem. While you may keep the potential consequences of each solution in mind, do not make judgments about any of the solutions. Simply write down each one on the *Problem-Solving Worksheet*. If the survivor has difficulty identifying options, ask him/her to tell you how a respected friend, teacher, coworker, or family member, would handle the problem. You can say:

Brainstorming	Step 3 is to Brainstorm, which is making a list of possible options to help you come up with ideas that you might not have considered. Let's write down as many possible options as we can think of, including good or bad ideas. Don't judge them yet. Don't think about whether they are realistic or not. Some might even sound silly, but that's okay. Let's just see how many you can think of and then write them down on your worksheet.

As you generate options, suggest additional ideas and assist with the shaping and modification of solutions.

Suggesting Ideas	Types of options that may be relevant include: • Ways of calming oneself • Taking action on parts of the problem that are controllable • Helpful things to say to oneself • Solutions that extend or build on things that are already helping • Ways the person has solved this in the past • Ways of changing the situation • Learning new skills for difficult situations • Getting help or support from other people • Getting additional services (have a list of available services to help you generate solutions)

When the survivor has listed at least 10 ideas, including several workable ideas, and when you have both run out of ideas, you've completed Step 3.

Step 4: Evaluate and Choose the Best Solutions

Have the survivor choose the best solution(s) based on what the probable result would be. Ask him/her to review each of the possible solutions and its positive and negative consequences.

As needed, have a discussion of the pros and cons of the various choices. While the survivor could choose several solutions, encourage him/her to take small steps and to avoid an unrealistic plan of action. Your role is to help shape his/her choices so that they are doable, practical, and beneficial, even if only partially, in solving the problem. Often the best solution is to combine different options that meet the goal identified in Step 3. You can say:

Choosing a Solution: Adult	The final step is to choose the best solution(s) and to test it out. Let's go back through the list of options and think about how helpful you think they would be. You can get rid of any that don't seem helpful and pick options that seem reasonable, that you think might help, and that you'd like to put into action. Your final solution to the goal might be a combination of options.

Alternative method for children:

For some children, you may have to systematically go down the list and evaluate each option. Then have the child rate each option with "pluses and minuses." This process can be very interactive. Try to have the content and ratings come from the child. You may say:

Choosing a Solution: Child	The final step is to choose the best solution and to plan to put it into action. Let's go through the list of options and think about how helpful you think each one would be. Mark a plus and/or minus for each option. The plus shows that you think it will help you achieve your goal, and a minus shows you don't think it will be that helpful. You can get rid of any option that doesn't seem helpful. Put a star next to any option that you think might help, and that you'd like to put into action.

Culture Alert

In many cultures, decision-making includes (and demands) that elders, designated healers, elder councils, or matriarchs have the final say, particularly when the problem involves interpersonal conflict, life change, or changes that may impact the group. In selecting a solution, ask whether other members of the survivor's immediate circle may expect to be included in the final solution and, if so, how best to include them.

After selecting the best solution, ask the survivor which action steps he/she will commit to in the days ahead. To make sure the plan is doable, ask about the day and time, any assistance needed, and any obstacle he/she foresees. For children, include parents/guardians if the solution requires adult assistance. If you have

planned another meeting, mention that you will both review the action steps, his/her efforts, and the results at that time. Emphasize the benefits of practice and of seeking further help. If needed, provide referral information for relevant agencies. Remind survivors to congratulate themselves for any efforts they are able to make toward reaching their goals.

For survivors who want to help their loved ones, ask if they feel sufficiently comfortable with the four steps of problem-solving to help others with a problem. If not, answer any questions they may have and extend an invitation to meet with their loved one together or individually.

Follow-Up Session: Review Assignment

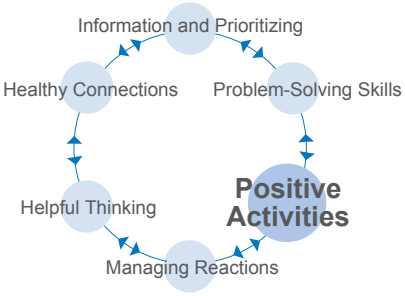
If the survivor returns for a follow-up visit, ask about his/her experiences in testing out the solution. Determine whether the survivor tried to implement the options decided upon during the previous contact and, if so, what the results were. The discussion should include three issues:

1. Which of the planned actions was the survivor able to take? What happened—what was the outcome? Was a short-term goal met, even partially? (If the survivor did not take steps to try out the solutions, explore the reasons for lack of follow-through, and consider changing the plan to make it more practical or doable.)
2. What is the next step needed to address the problem? Should you modify the plan? Take another of the "starred" actions? Brainstorm other possible solutions to add to the list.
3. If the survivor adequately addressed the problem or it is no longer current, consider using the session to apply problem-solving to a new difficulty. Explore whether the survivor made an effort to apply any of the steps of problem-solving to additional difficulties.

In your discussion, explore which solutions were useful, inquire how the survivor would do things differently if he/she had the chance, and generally encourage a review of the problem-solving plan. Be sure to praise the survivor for any efforts taken toward the goals.

After reviewing the current situation and deciding on the next action, recap the steps of the problem-solving approach to encourage its continued use.

Skill 3: Promoting Positive Activities



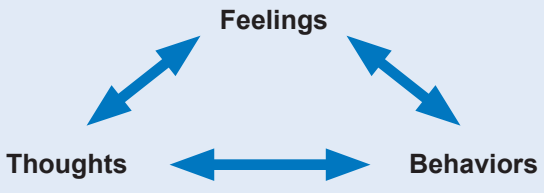
Goal	To help survivors plan and engage in positive, pleasurable, or meaningful activities to improve their mood and help them regain a sense of control
Rationale	Disasters often disrupt normal routines and activities that provide a sense of purpose, control, and pleasure. Helping survivors identify, schedule, and engage in positive, pleasurable, or meaningful activities can help them reestablish routines and engage in hobbies and other satisfying activities that can improve their mood and restore a sense of control.
Use for	Survivors who identify concerns about: • Feeling down or apathetic • Ongoing disruption of normal life routines and activities • Low involvement in pleasurable or positive activities Children who have stopped playing or who are engaged in high-risk, dangerous play
Time	20-30 Minutes
Handouts	Adults: *Choosing Positive Activities* *Positive Activity Worksheet* Children: *For Children: Choosing Things to Do* *For Children: Positive Activity Worksheet* *For Parents: Helping Your Child Plan Activities*
Skill Steps	After Explaining the Rationale for Engaging in Positive Activities: **1.** Identify and Plan One or More Activities **2.** Schedule Activities in a Calendar

Explain the Rationale for Engaging in Positive Activities

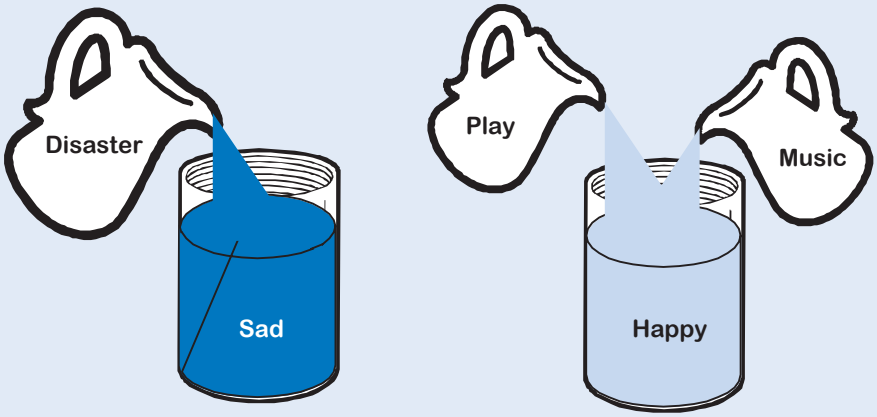
Following a disaster, survivors may benefit from engaging in activities that they previously found enjoyable or rewarding. Not only will engaging in familiar activities help to restore a sense of control and normalcy, but these activities can also help survivors with sadness, hopelessness, or a general lack of energy. This intervention reminds those survivors who have been overwhelmed with the recovery process and all of their additional responsibilities that they have reduced activities that are necessary for their own health and for their relationships with others. You may explain the rationale for engaging in positive activities as follows:

Rationale	Disasters often disrupt normal routines and activities that provide a sense of purpose, control, and pleasure. Planning and doing positive and meaningful activities can help you to re-start some activities in your life that can make things more normal. Engaging in hobbies, helping others, re-establishing family routines, and participating in satisfying activities can also improve your mood and restore a sense of control. Sometimes after a disaster, things change so much that it can feel as if you are starting over. The day-to-day things that people count on, like talking with a close neighbor or going to a favorite coffee shop, are suddenly gone. Sometimes family members and friends separate physically and emotionally after a disaster. There are several activities that people can engage in to help them during this stage of rebuilding their lives.

For those who have experienced feeling down, sad, apathetic, or having more negative than positive experiences, discuss the rationale for engaging in positive activities as follows:

Rationale: Adult	Let's spend a few minutes discussing ways of coping with feeling sad, withdrawn, or depressed—common reactions after a disaster. Having more negative experiences than positive ones can cause and maintain these feelings. Positive experiences tend to cause upbeat emotions, whereas negative experiences tend to cause upsetting emotions. So if you want to improve your mood, you need to increase positive experiences and decrease negative ones. Another way to think about this is to understand that our personalities are made up of our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. [Show diagram.] 

Rationale: Adult (cont.)	Feeling sad, withdrawn, or apathetic can come from any of these areas—feelings, thoughts, or behaviors. In addition, each area affects the other two areas. When people feel down, often the first thing that they attempt to change is their feelings. This makes sense because the goal is to *feel* better. However, feelings are actually the most difficult of these three areas to control and change. As you've probably found out, simply telling yourself to feel good usually does not work. In fact, it is easier to change your thoughts and behaviors, which will in turn change the way you feel. So, this skill involves changing your behavior by changing some of your day-to-day activities.

Rationale: Child	Since the disaster, you may have felt like you were filled up with a lot of icky feelings—sadness, fear, and just plain feeling bad. Now, I can't just make those bad feelings go away. I wish it were that easy! What we can do is work on filling up some of your time with activities that will fill you with positive, happy feelings. 

Provider Alert

Caution survivors that some activities will not be as enjoyable as before. Explain that it is still important to do them as part of their efforts to rebuild a sense of control and well-being. Do not mislead survivors into thinking that these skills will have a quick impact. Prepare them so that they will not be surprised and disappointed if they do not enjoy the activities as much as they expected. For example, the first family vacation following the disaster may not be as much fun as they want it to be. Remember that "enjoyment" can be too strong an expectation for people whose ability to enjoy is limited for the present. Try including family activities to validate that it has been a trying time (e.g., a special day together or story time before bed). Include activities that give survivors a breather from everyday stress, as well as activities that make them feel that they are contributing something meaningful to others.

Culture Alert

Many cultures maintain grieving rituals that are time-sensitive. It can be considered disrespectful to those who have died and to their families to engage in activities that are considered enjoyable or appear as rejoicing too soon after the event. Get information on such cultural traditions prior to beginning this skill.

Step 1: Identify and Plan One or More Activities

Review the List of Constructive Activities and Select One or More

To help identify and plan activities, use the *Promoting Positive Activities* handouts and worksheets in Appendix C. Encourage the survivor to write in additional activities and explore the types of activities he/she engaged in before the disaster. The purpose of the handouts and worksheets is to generate ideas; the list is not all-inclusive, nor does it reflect cultural differences. You may say:

Reviewing and Selecting Activities	One way to change your behavior is to be involved in more positive activities. Here is a list of activities that people often enjoy. I'd like for us to review the list and for you to come up with at least three activities that you can do this week. The list is only a guide to show you just how many choices there are. Feel free to add any activity you have enjoyed in the past that is not already on the list. Let's take a few minutes to talk about what kinds of things you did before the disaster that made you feel happy. Choose activities that you think you might enjoy and that you will actually do. Even if you don't feel like engaging in positive activities because you feel sad or lack energy, it is important that you agree to try some of them this week. Take a few minutes now to choose one to three activities that you think you can do.

Provide the survivor with the *Choosing Positive Activities* handout (use *For Children: Choosing Things to Do* for children and *For Parents: Helping Your Child Plan Activities* for parents or caregivers) to choose activities. Encourage the survivor to write in additional activities. You can also ask the survivor about types of activities he/she engaged in before the disaster.

Children, families, and older adults may have special considerations. As you work with a child or adolescent, have him/her select at least one activity that can be done alone and one that involves a friend, family member, or supportive adult. When working with a family, often the entire family can benefit from doing these activities together. Work with the survivor to come up with one activity that includes other members of the family. Keep in mind that "family" may extend beyond blood or legal ties. Sometimes people regard close friends and church members as "aunts/uncles." When working with an older adult, be mindful that the idea of starting over, rebuilding one's life, and scheduling positive activities can be extremely daunting later in life. Be sensitive to what "rebuilding" means at different life stages. In helping older adults schedule positive activities, consider their specific strengths and any physical, financial, or travel limitations.

As you work with the survivor to select activities, address potential safety issues. For example, do not encourage a survivor to take a walk if his/her neighborhood is dangerous. Survivors may be aware of the pre-existing risks in their environment, but their surroundings may have changed greatly since the disaster.

Step 2: Schedule Activities in a Calendar

To help schedule positive activities, you may say:

Scheduling Activities	We know from working with people who are sad, withdrawn, or "stuck" that it is not enough to just tell yourself to do more positive things. When you feel down, you may have trouble making decisions, feel exhausted, or be unable to think of anything worth doing. If your energy or determination is low, you may need a jump start to get out there and do pleasant things. If you feel as if you don't deserve to have fun in your life in the face of such tragedy, that can be pretty normal, but you don't have to let that stop you from following through on that part of your life that deserves and needs some playfulness and joy. In order to increase the chances of following through with these activities, let's use this calendar (show calendar on the *Positive Activities Worksheet*) to actually schedule the activities in the coming week. Look at the upcoming week and see if there are times when you can fit in one or more of your activities. If so, you can write them on the calendar.

Help the survivor determine what he/she will need to be able to do the activity(ies). Use the questions below to help him/her plan as needed:

- Do you want or need someone to do this activity with you? What's the best time to contact him/her? Put it on the calendar above.
- Do you need any supplies or preparation to help you do this activity (the right shoes, air in bicycle tires, yarn for knitting)? When will you get them? Put it on the calendar.
- How will you overcome any feelings that might come up and tempt you to cancel the plan (reminders of the trauma, feelings of loss, a lack of energy, or feeling as if you shouldn't take the time when there are so many other important tasks you need to tackle)?

Alternative method for children

Have children work with their caregivers, or offer to be their "secretary" and write down the activities on the calendar. Have young children choose a sticker, draw a picture, or choose a color to mark the days for their special activity. Provide caregivers with the handout, *For Parents: Helping Your Child Plan Activities*.

Provider Alert

Making time and creating space for activities, especially children's activities, can be a bit challenging for families in the aftermath of a disaster. Sometimes it can be useful to go through the steps in the *Building Problem-Solving Skills* module to help families develop a strategy for engaging in these activities. When working with survivors to determine a place (or a time) for activities, be sensitive to trauma reminders. You might find it helpful to review the information on coping with trauma reminders in the *Managing Reactions* module.

Follow-Up Session: Review Assignment

If the survivor returns for a follow-up visit, review the previous contact as follows:

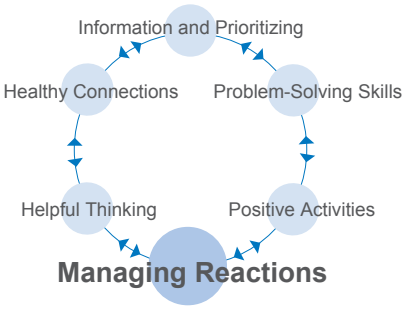
Reviewing Assignment	Last time, we discussed what causes and/or maintains feelings of depression or a low sense of purpose and control, and we discussed your strengths and your ability to give a part of your life what it needs and deserves—playfulness and joy. At this moment in your life, you have had too many negative experiences and not enough positive or pleasurable ones. We then took some time to schedule positive activities on your calendar to help you make room for them and remember to do them.

Next, determine whether the individual tried to do the activities and, if so, what happened and what were the effects on his/her mood. The discussion should include:

- Asking what activities the survivor was able to try. If the survivor did not try anything, explore the reasons for lack of follow-through, and consider reworking the task to make it more doable.
- Giving enthusiastic praise for any attempt to try to an activity, such as freeing up more time for it, talking to a family member about it, or making a call about it.
- Considering how the positive activity plan should be modified at this point:
  - If the survivor reports experiencing an increase in positive emotions, encourage doing the activity one or two more times per week or adding another activity.
  - If the survivor did not experience an improved mood, explore what happened. Perhaps the survivor should change the activity. However, often initial efforts to participate in potentially rewarding activities do not result in large changes in mood. Rather, the survivor may notice gradual or cumulative effects of positive activity over time. Help him/her to be patient and to continue a bit longer with the initial plan.
  - If the person did not experience an improved mood, you may also wish to explore whether he/she did the activity alone or with someone else. If he/she tried it alone, you may suggest retrying it with someone whom he/she knows, trusts, and respects.
  - Continued efforts along the same lines will be key to success, and so it is also important that you ask the survivor if there are people in his/her close circle who are preventing positive activities. If so, you may need to use the problem-solving techniques to generate solutions to this roadblock.

In your review of efforts to participate in positive activities, praise any efforts to take action, explore which activities, if any, seemed to improve mood, think through additional activities that the survivor might add, and assign further activities.

Skill 4:
Managing Reactions



Goal	To enhance skills to calm upsetting physical and emotional reactions; learn new strategies to deal with reactions to stressful situations, including reminders, and put words to difficult experiences to better understand and manage distress
Rationale	Disaster survivors may experience upsetting physical and emotional reactions that arise when confronting disaster-related experiences and reminders of the disaster, as well as ongoing stress or life changes. These reactions can adversely affect mood, decision-making, interpersonal life, daily functioning, and physical health. Learning skills to address and manage these reactions can help protect physical and mental health, improve self-confidence, enhance interpersonal and role functioning, and reduce maladaptive efforts at coping.
Use for	Survivors who identify distressing physical and/or emotional reactions in response to disaster-related experiences, disaster reminders, or current stressful situations
Time	45 Minutes
Handouts	Adults: *Managing Reactions Worksheet*; *Breathing Exercise*; *Posttraumatic Stress Reactions*; *Anger and Irritability*; *Sleep Difficulties*; *Reactions to Chronic Stress*; *Depressed Mood*; *Post-Disaster Fears*; *Grief Reactions*; *Supporting Someone After a Disaster*; *Drug and Alcohol Problems* Children: *Getting Control of Your Fears* Parents: *Helping Children Control Their Fears*; *Help for Children's Sleep Problems*; *Children's Intrusive (Unwanted) Thoughts & Traumatic Reminders*; *Children's Anxiety (Avoiding, Clinging, Fears)*; *Children's Tantrums and Acting-Out Behavior*; *Children and Grief: Information for Families*
Skill Steps	After Explaining the Rationale for Learning How to Manage Distressing Reactions: **1.** Identify Distressing Reactions and Their Triggers **2.** Teach Skills to Address Distressing Reactions **3.** Create a Plan to Manage a Reaction

Rationale for Learning How to Manage Distressing Reactions

Disaster-related experiences, loss, and ongoing post-disaster stresses can lead to strong physical and emotional reactions that can occur off and on for weeks, months, or years. These reactions can include bodily reactions like rapid heartbeat, rapid breathing, or feeling tense or nervous, and upsetting emotional reactions like feeling afraid, worried, angry, sad, or frustrated. Such reactions may lead to sleep difficulties or to increased use of medications, drugs, or alcohol. In addition, these reactions may be related to disturbances in interpersonal relationships with family members or friends, and impairments in functioning at work, at school, or in parenting.

Provide survivors with the following rationale:

Rationale	Many people who live through a disaster experience upsetting physical and emotional reactions that affect their mood, wear down their physical health, cause problems in relationships, and lead to problems in making decisions and getting things done. People often have reactions to stressful situations and reminders of the disaster that add significantly to distress. It can be very helpful to learn some skills to deal with distressing reactions and the different upsetting situations in your life. As with any skill, preparation, training, and practice make a difference. Do you think that learning about these skills may be helpful to you?

Step 1: Identify Distressing Reactions and Their Triggers

To help survivors identify distressing reactions and the circumstances that evoke them, you can say:

Identifying Reactions and Triggers	Each of us has different emotional reactions to different types of stress. People may be angry, sad, scared, worried, or have other negative emotions. They may also have physical reactions, like feeling tense, or having a rapid heartbeat, headache, or stomachache. Let's identify the major reactions you are dealing with and the stressful situations that caused them.

Provider Alert

Children and adolescents may find it helpful to use a diagram of the body that they can point to or on which they can color the places where they feel strong emotions or physical reactions. On a blank piece of paper, have the child draw a person or stick figure and then have him/her point out or color in places on the body where he/she feels the reactions.

Work with the survivor to select the distressing reaction he/she most wants to address. Follow the survivor's lead by asking questions such as:

Identifying the Priority Reaction	Which of these reactions is bothering you the most or getting in the way of living your life the way you want to? Which of these reactions has been most difficult for you to manage in the past? Which one of these reactions would be most helpful for us to tackle first? Describe the stressful situation in which this distressing reaction happened. Write both the reaction and the situation on the worksheet.

Provider Alert

Survivors experiencing extreme negative emotions (e.g., depression, grief, guilt, shame, feelings of worthlessness, and thoughts of revenge) may require a more intensive level of support. If extreme negative emotions persist, refer the survivor to a mental health service.

If survivors mention any strong physical reactions (e.g., acute chest pain), ask if they have seen a physician or other health professional for the condition. Make a medical referral if needed.

Step 2: Teach Skills to Address Distressing Reactions

In Appendix D, you can find information on how to manage several specific types of reactions. Select whichever handout(s) applies to the survivor's concerns and go over the handout(s) with them. Remind the survivor that he/she can refer to the handouts for help with reactions in the days, weeks, and months ahead.

- *Breathing Exercise*
- *Posttraumatic Stress Reactions*
- *Anger and Irritability*
- *Sleep Difficulties*
- *Reactions to Chronic Stress*
- *Depressed Mood*
- *Post-Disaster Fears*
- *Grief Reactions*
- *Supporting Someone After a Disaster*
- *Drug and Alcohol Problems*
- *For Children: Getting Control of Your Fears*
- *For Parents: Helping Children Control Their Fears*
- *For Parents: Help for Children's Sleep Problems*

- *For Parents: Children's Intrusive (Unwanted) Thoughts & Traumatic Reminders*
- *For Parents: Children's Anxiety (Avoiding, Clinging, Fears)*
- *For Parents: Children's Tantrums and Acting-Out Behavior*
- *For Parents: Children and Grief: Information for Families*

Once you have reviewed the handouts that are appropriate to the survivor's specific reactions, have the survivor select a few skills to help manage the specific reaction or stressful situation. You may also consider teaching one of the following SPR skills:

A. The Calming Skill—to control your breathing

B. The Skill to Put Thoughts and Feelings into Words by Writing—to organize and better understand your experience and to communicate with others

C. The Skill to Manage Reactions to Triggers—to handle stressful situations, daily hassles, and reminders before, during, and after they happen

After reviewing these skills, ask the survivor:

Selecting a Skill	Have you had any experience with these ways of managing reactions? Which one of these skills would you prefer to learn first?

With the survivor, select a skill to start with. Practice and review the skill well enough in your session so that the survivor can practice it between visits. You can review and refine it when you meet next time.

A. Calming Skill: Breathing Retraining

One skill that has been proven to be very helpful in calming is learning to breathe slowly and evenly. Explain that when we get anxious or upset, our bodies—especially our hearts and lungs—respond by breathing in a different way. You might say:

Rationale: Adult	Our breathing helps us balance different gasses in our bodies that are necessary for healthy functioning. When we get anxious, our breathing changes—we tend to breathe faster and shallower—which upsets the balance. Shallow breathing is helpful if we are fighting a threat—like running from a tiger in the jungle—but usually we are not doing that. When this balance of gasses is upset, we feel even more of the physical reactions of anxiety or distress. The way we breathe can calm our strong emotional and physical reactions and prevent them from getting worse.

For young children, you can say:

Rationale: Child	Imagine a puppy running like crazy all over the yard. How is that puppy panting? [Children tend to enjoy humorous re-enactments of this. If a child is afraid of puppies, talk about bunnies.] That's right, they pant in really quick, shallow breaths. That's the way we breathe when we get upset about something. When we pant like a puppy, the panting makes our bodies feel all jittery, and we can't calm down. Now, I want you to imagine a big dog lying out in the sun, resting. How is that big dog breathing? Right! He's taking nice slow breaths. When we take slow breaths like a big dog, it helps our bodies calm down. We're going to learn how to take those nice, slow big dog breaths so that you can help your body calm down whenever you start to feel upset.

To introduce the breathing skill, you may say:

Introduction: Adult	I'm going to teach you a skill to calm strong physical and emotional reactions. Like riding a bike, it takes time to master. Once you can do it well, it will become quite natural to do when you are upset. In fact, if you practice slow breathing every day, particularly when you are calm, you'll be able to use it to keep these reactions from becoming too frequent and strong. People who practice this regularly are less likely to have their bodies react strongly in stressful situations. The breathing skill can help reduce physical tension and anxious or upset feelings. I want to teach you this now so you can begin using it right away. Before I do, I'm wondering if you've learned any breathing techniques in the past and how they have worked for you. *If yes:* What have you learned and has it helped? [Engage in brief discussion.] *If it helped in the past:* OK, let's review this skill to see if it can work in this situation. *If he/she has had a negative experience with previous attempts at a breathing exercise:* Discuss the reactions and concerns, and find a way to tailor this exercise to produce a positive response. For instance, if he/she gets more anxious when closing his/her eyes, practice the breathing with eyes open at first until it's more comfortable. Explain that when people first start to relax, sometimes they can get more anxious before they get calmer. But when they continue to breathe and focus on calming themselves, this reaction will most likely subside. *If no:* OK. Then this will be something new for you. I hope that you'll find this new way of breathing useful and very calming.

For children, you may say:

Introduction: Child	Has anyone taught you how to do this type of breathing before? Maybe another counselor or a coach? *If yes:* Great. Show me how you do your breathing. Let's practice together. [Give positive feedback. Discuss how best to practice and use this skill. If needed, modify the breathing exercise to make sure the child is using all the steps.] *If no:* Great, we can learn something new today. Just think of the look on your parents'/caregivers' faces when you tell them that you spent the afternoon learning how to breathe! This won't take long to learn, and I think it will really help.

Remind the survivor that our breathing affects the way we feel, and that taking a slow even breath helps us to calm down when we are stressed out or anxious. However, contrary to popular belief, taking a deep breath usually isn't helpful and can actually lead to even more feelings of anxiety. The best way to breathe is actually to take a normal breath and exhale slowly. So it is the exhaling that is the key to the success of this skill.

Practice the breathing skill in the visit as follows:

Instructions	**1.** Get comfortable in the chair and—if it is okay with you—sit so your back is fully supported (if there is any pain with this, then there is no gain). Now, uncross your arms, hands, and legs so there is no tension and allow your feet to be flat on the floor so you feel the ground supporting you. Keep your eyes closed or open, whichever is more calming for you. Take a slow, small breath in through your nose, with your mouth closed, to the count of five. Focus on extending your abdomen while you breathe in slowly. **2.** Now pause for five seconds. **3.** Exhale slowly through your nose or mouth to the count of seven. Say a soothing word to yourself as you breathe out like: "C-a-a-a-a-a-a-l-m." **4.** Breathe in, two, three, four, five. Hold, two, three, four, five. Exhale, two, three, four, five, six, seven. **5.** Breathe in, two, three, four, five. Hold, two, three, four, five. Exhale, two, three, four, five, six, seven. **6.** Breathe in, two, three, four, five. Hold, two, three, four, five. Exhale, two, three, four, five, six, seven. **7.** Breathe in, two, three, four, five. Hold, two, three, four, five. Exhale, two, three, four, five, six, seven. **8.** Now do this sequence on your own, at your own pace, for five breaths, and then return to your normal breathing.

When finding a soothing word, ask if the survivor prefers a specific word. Most people find the words “calm” or “relax” or “release” helpful. Have the survivor select the most calming word and use that word when practicing the skill. Occasionally a survivor may report that the word “relax” actually stimulates arousal. If this is the case, select another cue such as “exhale.”

Answer any questions the survivor may have regarding this skill. Ask him/her to practice this exercise every day, using from 10 to 15 breaths, depending on how much time he/she has. Emphasize that using the skill on a regular basis when not distressed (such as first thing in the morning) will help him/her remain calmer in the face of stressful situations. Discuss specific times and places where the exercise might be most useful.

Alternative Method for Children

When working with children, use the same basic steps given for adults, but shorten the inhalation to a count of three and the exhalation to a count of five. It is also important to help children focus on what their body does while they breathe. For example, have them put their hands on their stomach when they inhale and notice how it inflates like a balloon filling up with air. Or turn the breathing skill into a game by blowing soap bubbles or telling a story and having the child help you imitate a character who takes controlled breaths. Remember that children enjoy being the expert, so look for opportunities to reinforce their learning by having them teach this skill to other family members. When choosing a cue for children, have them pick their favorite color; then they “breathe in the pleasant color” and “breathe out the gray,” which is like breathing out the negative feelings.

B. Skill to Put Thoughts and Feelings into Words: Writing Exercise

Teach survivors a writing exercise that will help them put their thoughts and feelings into words. Explain that when we get anxious or upset, we have difficulty organizing and understanding our thoughts and feelings. You might say:

Introduction	Many survivors find it helpful to put thoughts and feelings into words, in order to organize them and better understand their experiences. The more you understand your feelings and thoughts, the better you will be able to communicate them to others. Some people find that writing helps them. Have you ever found writing helpful? Maybe you wrote in a journal or kept a diary. Maybe you wrote a letter or email to someone and found that it helped you explain or understand a situation. Or maybe you’ve thought about writing a poem, lyrics to a song, or a rap. If you’re interested in this, let’s try the writing exercise.

Rationale

Survivors can use writing to manage and reduce the distress they have related to memories of loss, the disaster, or current or future stressful situations. Many disturbing aspects of a loss or a disaster experience can come back to mind in the form of intrusive memories, nightmares, or even flashbacks. Survivors may have serious concerns that have arisen since the disaster, are happening now, or may happen in the future that can be helped by writing about them. Writing allows survivors to lay out and organize jumbled and unstructured concerns. Through writing, they can put words to and make sense of their feelings. Writing can

reduce the intensity of strong emotions, help survivors to understand situations that might trigger reminders, and pave the way for helpful communication with others. This exercise teaches the survivor to deal more effectively with his/her memories and concerns, and it helps you to identify key concerns to discuss with the survivor. For survivors who don't know how to write or don't feel comfortable writing, discuss an alternative solution with them, such as recording their thoughts with a tape/digital recorder or expressing themselves artistically.

Provide survivors with the following rationale:

Rationale	People who go through a disaster or lose a loved one often have unwanted memories and thoughts about their experiences during the disaster, frustrations and concerns related to post-disaster stresses, and adversities that cause them distress. Sometimes there are so many thoughts and feelings that they feel overwhelmed and cannot make sense of them. The thoughts that keep popping into their minds are a sign that the experience, or some aspect of what is happening now, is still "unfinished business." Instead of getting upset at these random memories and thoughts, you can deal with them by writing about them. Writing is like unpacking and sorting complicated things so that you can deal with them. Right now, you may feel that these concerns or memories are too big or too distressing to handle. That's understandable. It takes time for the mind to sort through and deal with things. In some sense, it's like feeling very uncomfortable after eating a large, heavy meal that is difficult for your body to digest. After some time, when your body has digested the food, you feel a sense of relief. Your memories and concerns are like the heavy meal, and your reactions continue to occur because you haven't yet digested the disaster and all the subsequent changes and stress. Writing about your concerns will help you to "digest" your reactions so that they can stop interfering with your daily life. Here's another example. Your memories are like a whole pile of papers that you don't want to deal with. Instead of going through this stuff, the easy short-term solution might be to shove it all in a cupboard and quickly shut the door, so it doesn't all come tumbling back out again. However, there are a couple of problems with this. First, if the papers haven't been put in neatly, they might not stay in there. They could create a lot of pressure inside the cupboard, push the door open, and fall out again at any time. To stop this from happening, you might have to constantly lean on the doors of the cupboard, which requires a lot of time and effort and—even when the doors aren't open—you might be spending a lot of time and effort worrying about what will happen if and when they do. Second, when you go into the cupboard to find a certain piece of paper, it is unlikely that you will find it without all of the rest of the papers tumbling out as well. Because of the way you shoved the papers into the cupboard, trying to get just one piece out means that you will have to deal with all the papers.

Rationale (cont.)	This cupboard full of papers is a little bit like your memories and concerns. You've tried to push them all away, but they inevitably keep popping back up, just like the papers falling out of the cupboard. Even when you try hard, you can't always shut out these memories. Something in your environment reminds you, or you may deliberately recall the memories when someone asks you about what happened. These occasions are like trying to get that one piece of paper out of the cupboard—you can't remember the parts you need to remember without all of the overwhelming feelings and responses that come with it. The point of writing about the problems is to get everything out of the cupboard, sort it out, and pack it away in an ordered fashion so you can understand it and control it. Writing is one of the best ways to manage and deal with these memories and concerns that are on your mind.

Instructions

In explaining the writing exercise to the survivor, make the following points:

Instructions	• When you go home, find a place and a time when you can write comfortably without interruptions for at least 30 minutes. Next, ask yourself, "What is distressing me right now?" It may be an experience during the disaster, something that has happened since then, or something that you are worrying about in the future. Start writing about whatever is distressing for you in as much detail as you can. If you are writing about the disaster, write about what you saw, what you heard, smelled, felt, and the thoughts and feelings you had at the time. This can be upsetting, but writing about your feelings will help you unpack these memories and make sense of them. Try to include details about your feelings—both emotional and physical—and what you are thinking and saying to yourself. If you are having distressing thoughts about the death of a loved one, you can write a letter to him/her and express your feelings or the things you would say if he/she were still here. • As you are writing, think about the things you did to help yourself or others during this distressing time. For example, what did you do to get to safety? How did you survive? As the event was occurring, or right after it was over, did you help anybody, or were you helped by anybody, or did you see anybody help any other survivor? • Try to write for at least 30 minutes, so that you give yourself time to write about whatever is bothering you. If this is not long enough time to write all you have to say, keep writing, if you have time. If not, find another time as soon as you can to take up where you left off. Remember, it is important to write about everything, so that you don't leave out any of your concerns. • You may not feel comfortable with writing. Other ways to accomplish the same goals are by speaking into a voice recorder, drawing or painting, creating a piece of art (collage), making a scrapbook or memory box—or any activity in which you can express your feelings and sort through and organize your thoughts.

Instructions (cont.)	• During or after the writing task, you will find that different thoughts and feelings will arise, including negative ones. *Helpful Thinking Skills* may be useful to address them. Try to identify the unhelpful thoughts and think about whether or not they are realistic. For example, someone writing about surviving a hurricane may feel distressed at recalling all the details about it. He may think, "This memory is so terrible, I can't cope with it." This thought will cause him to feel more distressed and hopeless. But if this person can learn to practice a different thought, such as, "This memory is terrible, but at least I could write about it," or "No wonder I am reacting to the reminder; it brings back a very difficult moment," this more helpful thought will contribute to reducing the distressing reaction. • At the conclusion of the writing exercise, include an example of how you would like things to improve or how it might be possible to prevent the event from happening again.

Suggest that survivors repeat the writing task several times, each time building in new helpful thoughts that they have identified. This will help them think about the situation that concerns them, understand the key issues in a helpful way, and assist them in managing their reactions. If the survivor is distressed about the death of a loved one, encourage him/her in subsequent sessions to write to the deceased. The survivor may wish to tell the loved one how he/she hopes to do things constructively in the future and to move on, while at the same time cherishing his/her memory.

In-Session Writing Rehearsal

The survivor can spend some time rehearsing the writing exercise in session with you. After explaining the rationale, suggest writing for 10 minutes about his/her disaster-related experiences or current concerns about post-disaster stresses or adversities. Explain that he/she does not need to discuss what he/she has written unless he/she wishes to do so. Rehearsing the writing exercise in session allows the survivor to develop confidence about writing and to discuss with you any reactions to or questions about the writing before he/she completes the exercise at home.

Provider Alert

This exercise is not for everybody. It is intended for those who still have problems with distressing emotions, memories, or thoughts, and who are interested in exercises that can help them deal with these ongoing reactions. It is for people with ongoing adversity and fear about their current and future life. For example, someone who has lost his/her job might write about being fired, the impending rent or mortgage due, or the uncertainty of starting a small business.

The writing task may not be appropriate for those unable to manage the distress that often arises when they write. In deciding who may not be appropriate for the writing task include:

- Those who feel extreme guilt about an action that caused harm
- Those who have active suicidal thoughts
- Those with a history of a psychotic condition

Provider Alert (cont.)

- Those with extreme anxiety
- Those with a history of emotional lability
- Those who are currently substance dependent

Advise the survivor that he/she may need a short period of recovery after the writing exercise. He/she should not plan to write just before a stressful event, such as a job interview or a test at school. Discuss a concrete plan for a short recovery period, like taking a hot bath, listening to music, doing breathing exercises, or reading a favorite poem.

Alternative Method for Children

Older children and adolescents may be quite capable of doing the writing exercise on their own. Help them plan where they can work comfortably, and have a trusted adult nearby if they start feeling distressed and need a break. Many adolescents are already adept at writing their thoughts and feelings in diaries or in public social networking forums such as MySpace, Facebook, or Twitter. Caution teens, however, against posting this particular writing exercise publicly.

Younger children can benefit from your playing secretary and writing down their thoughts as they dictate. Another way children better understand their experience is to draw pictures of the disaster and talk about the details. Before they draw this picture, have them first draw a picture of a place where they feel safe or of something that is calming to them. You can help children name their feelings and concerns. You can then ask them to tell you a story about the picture by asking things like, “What did you do to get to safety?” “Did you help anybody?” and “Did anyone help you?” Then, invite children to draw things that they want to happen or that would help them feel better or safer. Help the child to make sense of his/her experience, to find words to communicate to others, and to understand how he/she may be reminded of the distressing experience.

Developmental Alert

Young children may have difficulty remembering the sequence of events and identifying the different emotions that they experienced at different times. Also, young children especially may use very concrete thinking, may remain confused about what happened, or entertain highly idiosyncratic explanations for what happened. In those cases, have a caregiver help co-construct the child’s account of the experience.

C. Skill to Manage Reactions to Triggers

After a disaster, people’s distressing reactions may be triggered by many experiences and situations. Reactions may be *internal* (e.g., upsetting thoughts or memories, unpleasant emotions or bodily reactions) or *external* (e.g., encountering a stressful situation or a place that triggers upsetting memories). Creating a plan to deal with distressing triggers can help survivors:

1. Learn to manage their reactions to the stressful situation or reminder
2. Learn that situations like this do not have to be as distressing as people sometimes expect

3. Build confidence in their ability to tolerate and manage their reactions to a wide range of challenging situations, whether anticipated or unforeseen

Rationale

To give adults a rationale for learning how to manage reactions, you may say:

Rationale: Adult	Stressful situations, daily hassles, and being confronted by reminders of the disaster can often cause strong reactions like worry, frustration, and feeling scared, anxious, sad, or angry. Experiencing strong negative emotional and bodily reactions (like having your heart beat faster or becoming tense and afraid) can contribute to health problems (such as high blood pressure) down the road. Many things can act as upsetting reminders of the disaster, including things or places you see every day, noises, or odors. Certain people can also act as reminders, even close friends or family members, which can strain those relationships. Facing reminders over and over again creates chronic stress that can sap your energy and make you more irritable. Learning to manage your reactions to stressful situations or reminders takes practice, but you will find that each time you do it, you get a little better at it. Also, you will learn a very important lesson: that you have more control than you think. Triggers don't have to cause the same reactions in you over and over again. If you get upset, you can calm yourself so that the reactions are not too disruptive.

To give a rationale to children, you may say:

Rationale: Child	When something bad has happened, there are many ways that you might be reminded of it afterwards. You may go to places, see objects, or hear noises, or you may be with people that make you think about what happened and make you feel scared, anxious, sad, or even angry. Your reactions to these reminders can get in the way of what you are doing at home, at school, or with your friends. Also, you may worry or be upset about other things, like the changes in your life. It is helpful to learn skills to deal with these reactions so that they don't get in your way, and so you can get along better with your family and friends, do better at school, and have fun doing the things that you like to do. Learning these skills takes practice. But you will find that each time you try, you get a little better at it. And you learn a very important lesson: that you have more control than you think.

Identify a Trigger Situation

First ask the survivor to describe a recent stressful situation that brought up strong upsetting feelings. Tell him/her that this situation could have been stressful for a variety of reasons:

- It may have caused you to have upsetting memories of the disaster or the loss of a loved one
- It may have involved dealing with day to day hassles that are very frustrating

- It may have involved other challenging situations, like a job interview, having to move again, or taking a big test at school

Use Helpful Strategies Before, During, and After a Trigger Situation

Next, explain that there are three main strategies for managing upsetting trigger situations:

1. To anticipate stressful situations or reminders that are likely to occur and prepare for them
2. To have a standing plan for managing stressful situations and reminders when they occur (especially important for dealing with unexpected triggers)
3. To give yourself time to recover after the trigger

Below are strategies to manage reactions to stressful situations or reminders. Discuss with survivors how they may use each *before, during,* and *after* a stressful situation. Say that while they may be doing some of these already, adding more can really help.

- **Take Care of Yourself:** Make your body and mind better able to handle stress by taking care of your physical health, eating a healthy diet, and getting regular exercise and adequate sleep.
- **Schedule Positive Activities:** Engage in constructive activities that you find meaningful and rewarding.
- **Use Calming Strategies:** Use breathing or positive distracting activities (i.e., music, movies, walks, or social interactions). Take a short break in a quiet place and relax your mind and body by focusing on a peaceful image or thought. Visualize yourself in a favorite calming place or doing a favorite activity.
- **Use Discrimination:** Discriminate between the situation or the reminder and the disaster itself. Think of the ways in which the situation or reminder is different from the disaster. Remind yourself that this experience is just a reminder, for example, “That was then, this is now—I am at a different place than before.”
- **Use Helpful Thinking:** Use helpful thinking skills to have a positive mental attitude, to control self-defeating statements, and to stay encouraged.
- **Get Social Support:** Choose someone close to you for support. Tell him/her how you feel about the situation. Something as simple as having someone take your hand, even briefly, can help to calm physical and emotional reactions.
- **Use the Writing Skill:** Write down how you feel and why you feel that way to help calm yourself and give yourself time to decide how you want to deal with your feelings or communicate your feelings to others.
- **Use Spiritual or Religious Practices:** These practices (e.g., prayer, meditation, mindfulness, compassion) can give you comfort and a sense of strength and hope.

Step 3: Create a Plan to Manage Reactions

Next, use the *Managing Reactions Worksheet* to plan how the survivor can use and practice the selected strategy(ies) in the days following the visit. Have the survivor identify specific situations where he/she can use the strategy(ies). Review the steps involved and answer any questions that the survivor may have. Highlight the importance of practice: the more you do it, the easier and more effective it becomes.

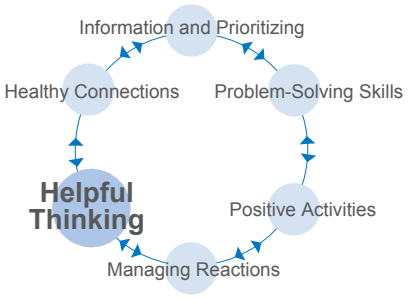
With children, rehearse the steps that they will take to manage their reactions, for example, how they might tell their parent if they are being reminded of the distressing experience. For young children, include parents/caregivers in the planning process or tell them the plan so they can help the child to carry it out.

Follow-Up Session: Review Assignment

If the survivor returns for another visit, review his/her experiences with the skills to manage his/her negative reactions. Did he/she try to implement the plan you chose together at the last contact? If so, how well did it work? Praise any efforts to take action, explore which skills seemed useful, and inquire how the survivor would do things differently to better manage his/her reactions. During this discussion, focus on the following:

- How well the skills worked
- What the survivor has learned about managing reactions
- If a skill did not work, decide how the skill can be improved (or select another skill that might be useful). Remember that part of the problem-solving may focus on who was nearby as the survivor practiced the managing reaction skill; perhaps discuss how social connections and proximity to certain people in the survivor's circle can either augment or hamper the managing reaction skill they are using
- Select another skill if the survivor had a negative reaction for which he/she needs help

Skill 5:
Promoting Helpful Thinking



Goal	To help survivors identify what they are saying to themselves about the disaster experience or their current situation and to choose less distressing ways of thinking
Rationale	Many survivors struggle with distressing disaster-related thoughts as they try to adjust to post-disaster circumstances. These negative thoughts help maintain negative emotions, such as fear, hopelessness, anger, anxiety, sadness, and guilt. Identifying and practicing more helpful ways of thinking can improve mood and reduce the intensity of distressing emotional and physical reactions.
Use for	Survivors who have concerns about: • Distressing emotional and/or physical reactions • Being overly self-critical or negative • Addressing fears and anxiety
Time	30-45 Minutes
Handouts	Adults: *Helpful Thinking Handout* *Helpful Thinking Worksheet* *Payoff Matrix Worksheet* Children: *For Children: Helpful Thinking Handout* *For Children: Helpful Thinking/Good Coach, Bad Coach Worksheet*
Skill Steps	After Explaining the Rationale for Helpful Thinking: **1.** Identify Unhelpful Thoughts **2.** Identify Helpful Thoughts **3.** Rehearse Helpful Thoughts **4.** Assign Practice of Helpful Thoughts

Explain the Rationale for Helpful Thinking

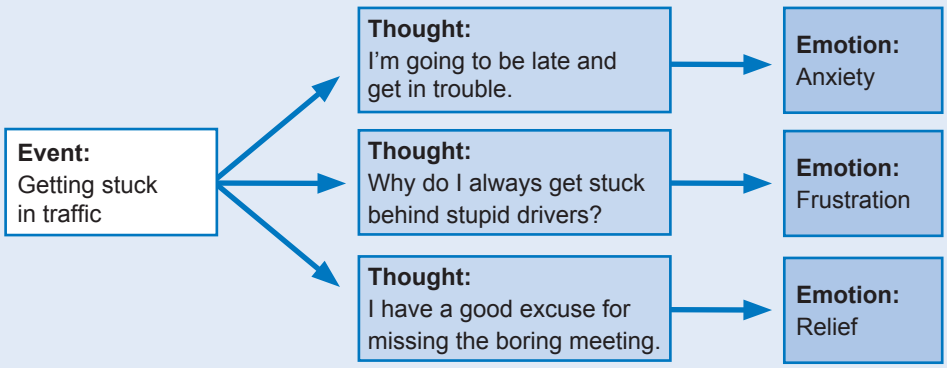
The ways that we think about ourselves and the things that have happened to us shape how we feel and behave. Although we cannot change what has happened, we can change the focus of our thoughts in ways that can make us feel more hopeful and less overwhelmed. The strategies presented here can help survivors focus more on *helpful* ways of thinking about themselves and their current situation, especially when their thoughts are excessively self-critical or overly negative. By focusing on helpful thoughts rather than upsetting ones, survivors can improve their mood and pave the way for more effective coping. The strategies in this module help survivors look at how they currently think about the disaster and its effects on their lives. Survivors learn how these thoughts influence how they feel and behave and how to focus more on helpful thoughts and less on upsetting ones.

To get started, give a basic example of the ways that different thoughts about the same event might lead to different emotions. The goal here is to show that some thoughts tend to produce distressing feelings while other thoughts do not. You may say:

Rationale: Adult

Certain situations make people feel a certain way. For example, being stuck in traffic might make someone feel angry. However, an important influence on how people feel in a particular situation is how they think about the situation. If a man stuck in traffic thinks, "At least I'll miss that boring morning meeting," he may feel a little happier. On the other hand, if he thinks, "This is going to make me late and my boss will really punish me," he may feel anxious. Or, if he thinks, "Why am I always stuck behind stupid drivers?" he may feel frustrated and irritable. It is important to understand that:

- **Thoughts influence feelings.** Angry thoughts produce angry feelings, anxious thoughts produce anxious feelings, hopeless thoughts produce feelings of hopelessness, and calming thoughts help people calm down.
- **Thoughts and feelings are different from one another.** Thoughts are words, sentences, or mental pictures that run through our minds like a thought bubble in a cartoon. Emotions are feelings we feel in our bodies when we think a thought. For example, we may feel a cold chill down our spine when we are scared, tightness in our chest when we are afraid, heaviness in our chest if we are sad, or light on our feet if we are excited.



Rationale: Adult (cont.)	After a disaster, it is common for people's thoughts about the world and themselves to change. For example, survivors often see the world as stressful, unpredictable, or a dangerous place. They may have trouble trusting other people or see their situation as hopeless. Understandably, people feel deeply upset by things that happen during a disaster. However, it helps to know that people under stress can develop habits of thought that actually make their situation even worse by increasing feelings of distress. "Unhelpful" habits of thought might include thinking that "Absolutely nothing is going well" or "Things will never get better." We call these thoughts unhelpful because they can make it even more difficult to deal with the situation by increasing feelings of being overwhelmed or hopeless. People under stress often find it helpful to become aware of these unhelpful thoughts. They consider whether there are more helpful thoughts to focus on that might make it easier to deal with their situation. For example, instead of thinking "Absolutely nothing is going well," a person might think, "This is a tough time for me, but I am doing some things well." People rarely take the time to examine what they are thinking, so unhelpful thoughts just keep happening more or less automatically. The basic strategy is first to spend a little time examining your thoughts about the disaster and its effects on your life. Then we'll go over ways to test which thoughts are unhelpful and come up with more helpful thoughts to focus on instead. Finally, we'll go over some ways to focus instead on more realistic, helpful thoughts.

Rationale: Child	Today we are going to talk about how the way you think about things can change the way you feel. Let me give you an example about two boys: One morning, the first boy wakes up and sees that it is raining hard outside. He thinks, "This is horrible! There could be a terrible storm and something bad might happen!" What do you think he is feeling? [Reinforce any answers related to feeling bad, scared, etc.] The second boy wakes up and sees the rain. He thinks, "This is excellent! I love playing in the rain and I get to miss boring practice today!" What do you think he is feeling? [Reinforce answers related to happy, positive feelings.] You see, the two boys woke up to the exact same situation—a rainy day—but how they thought about it made them have very different feelings.

When working with children, have the child draw a stick figure, and in the thought balloon have him/her write the negative thought. Then have the child color the negative feelings. This way you can demonstrate how thoughts and feelings are connected. Have the child draw another stick figure, and in the balloon write the helpful thought. When the child colors the more positive feelings, discuss the differences between the two drawings. Some children may even want to name each figure. Throughout this module, help the child identify his/her helpful and unhelpful thoughts by identifying which figure each thought represents.

Provider Alert

Helping a survivor focus on helpful thoughts is not the same as just thinking positive thoughts. We need to be careful in the aftermath of disaster not to minimize the reality of the trauma or loss that the survivor has experienced by negating or criticizing his/her reported beliefs. You should state that whatever the person is thinking is *understandable* in the context of his/her experience, but that focusing less on unhelpful thoughts and more on helpful ones will help the survivor move forward. Never enter a debate with the survivor about whether or not his/her thoughts are justified, but rather help him/her test out the effect those thoughts have on his/her emotions and actions. The goal is to help survivors identify and spend more time on helpful thoughts that tend to mobilize and energize them, rather than on thoughts that cause distress and thus interfere with recovery.

When dealing with issues of guilt, it may be uncomfortable to recognize that some of the survivor's actions may warrant guilt. When you realize that the survivor is struggling to cope with perceptions that are indeed accurate, consider that the survivor might benefit from a referral for additional services. Situations such as these generally fall outside of the scope of SPR and reflect a need for more intensive interventions.

Culture Alert

In some cultural traditions, the belief in the divine (God, multiple deities, Karma, Allah, to name a few) is a significant influence on thinking, behavior, and feelings. While this belief has been shown to be a protective factor for recovery, it can also produce negative reactions when the disaster is attributed to the wrath or divine justice of a deity "punishing"' the disaster-exposed population for unacceptable behaviors. Depending on survivors' ethnic background and religious practice, ask them how religious/spiritual beliefs contribute to or influence their feelings, behaviors, and thoughts.

Developmental Alert

Children, especially young children, often rely heavily on their caregivers and other adults when forming thoughts. Children may adopt negative thoughts that they have overheard from the important adults in their lives. In addition to challenging children's unhelpful thoughts, briefly assess and modify their caregivers' unhelpful thoughts as well. Let caregivers know that there will be a time and place where they can share strong negative feelings (e.g., fear, frustration, anger, discouragement) in private but, as much as possible, they should create a place of emotional and physical safety for their children. Children's adjustment following disasters may be more closely connected to caregivers' distress levels than to their level of exposure to the disaster.

Step 1: Identify Unhelpful Thoughts

To introduce this step, take out the *Helpful Thinking Handout* or the *For Children: Helpful Thinking Handout* in Appendix E and fold it so that the survivor is not looking at the helpful thought alternatives. Point out that there are different categories of unhelpful thoughts (e.g., poor coping, helplessness, lack of safety, guilt, and blame). Go over the statements listed below each category. Then discuss how each of these thoughts can result in negative emotions.

Help the survivor see that, while his/her thoughts may be fairly accurate (i.e., another flood is likely to occur sometime in the future), the unspoken assumption that he/she will not be able to handle the next flood is the unhelpful part of the thought. Use the *Helpful Thinking Worksheet* to put such a thought into an "If, then" format. For instance, "IF another flood is likely to strike, THEN I won't be able to handle it."

If the survivor has difficulty identifying unhelpful thoughts first, reverse the order and ask him/her to identify feelings first, then the thoughts that go along with those feelings:

- "When you think about the disaster, what kinds of reactions do you have?"
- "As you focus on the strongest reactions, what thoughts do you have?"

Provider Alert

One barrier to having more helpful thoughts is the negative interpretation of events held by others in the survivor's social network, for example, the belief among disenfranchised groups that the disaster and post-disaster circumstances reflect purposeful neglect or worse by more powerful entities such as government or businesses. This interpretation may provoke perceptions of injustice, persecution, or powerlessness, and accompanying feelings of anger or a desire for revenge. Because this interpretation is borne out of a group process, it may be very difficult to challenge on an individual level. Working with community leaders to develop and share a more helpful interpretation with community members can be helpful here. Be mindful, however, that some of the views held by these groups may in part reflect the reality of their circumstances. A major advantage of the group context is that some individuals are able to assist in identifying extremely negative unhelpful thoughts in other group members.

Step 2: Identify Helpful Thoughts

Identifying an unhelpful thought ("I can never be safe") does not necessarily help the survivor to replace it with a more helpful thought ("I am safe most of the time"). The next step, therefore, is to identify, clarify, and write down alternative, helpful thoughts. To start, reintroduce the *Helpful Thinking Handout*. Just as the survivor previously reviewed unhelpful thoughts and feelings, have him/her now look at the alternate helpful thoughts and the resulting emotional responses.

Next, take out the *Helpful Thinking Worksheet*. If the individual can identify some good alternative thoughts and better ways of thinking, let him/her do most of the work. If survivors need help identifying good helpful thoughts to focus on instead of the unhelpful thoughts, you may either remind them of goals they have set for themselves, or ask them what goals they have for themselves in regards to "getting through" their challenges (e.g., getting over their fears so they can help their children or getting a job). Then ask them if they can identify thoughts that will help them to make progress towards their goals. You can also directly suggest alternate thoughts for the survivor to practice. As you and the survivor generate helpful thoughts, take time to discuss the feelings he/she associates with them, focusing on the positive: feeling a greater sense of control, feeling safe, and feeling hopeful. You can say something like:

Identifying Helpful Thoughts	You've identified the unhelpful thought of "I am afraid to go to work because I am under so much stress that I'm going to make mistakes and create more stress," and we agreed that the unspoken part of this thought is "and I couldn't handle more stress." You're having a hard time coming up with an alternative helpful thought. One of the goals you identified for yourself is that you want to make enough money at work to renovate the damage to your house, and to pay for a nice vacation for the kids. How about if we focus on that goal, and use the helpful thought of "Even though I'm afraid I'll make a mistake, I can take it day by day, and remember the pay-offs of making enough money at work to renovate the house and take the kids on vacation. And if I do make a mistake, I can put my action plan from Managing Reactions in place to manage that stress." Would that thought energize and motivate you more than your unhelpful thought?

Alternate Child Exercises

To engage children in a discussion of thoughts, it is best to use the following games and activities:

Go Fish (Appropriate for Preschool and Elementary School-Age Children)

Provide the child with a set of colorful "fish" made from construction paper, which are blank on the "up" side, and have pictures and names of helpful and unhelpful thoughts on the "down" side. Attach a paperclip to the mouth of each fish. Give the child a "fishing pole" (e.g., chopstick, pencil, straw) with a string attached and a magnet tied to the end of the string. Children "go fish" for "helpful" fish. After catching a fish, the child examines the picture and you describe the strategy. The child decides whether to keep the fish (because it is helpful) or to throw the fish back (because it is not helpful). Have the child describe how he/she could use the strategy on the "kept fish" in his/her life. Then help the child practice the strategy.

Memory Game (Appropriate for Preschool and Elementary School-Age Children)

Lay index cards containing unhelpful thoughts, helpful thoughts, negative feelings, and helpful feelings face down. When the child pairs an unhelpful thought with a negative feeling, he/she has a match. Pairing a helpful thought with a positive feeling is also a match.

Good Coach, Bad Coach (Appropriate for Adolescents and Elementary School-Age Children)

Present the adolescent with a colorful picture of a young person playing a sport with blank cartoon speech bubbles near the head, and the caption, "What a Good Coach Says." Ask the adolescent to identify a favorite sports star and ask him/her whether the star has a good game every game. When the teen inevitably responds "No," ask him/her to describe the star's last bad game. Then ask, "And when the sports star returns to talk to the coach, what does a good coach say?" Write down in the blank speech bubbles encouraging and helpful statements he/she identifies (e.g., "you tried your best," "you'll do better next time," "just practice until you get the shot down"). Then present the adolescent with a similar picture labeled "What a Bad Coach Says," and ask him/her to write or describe unhelpful statements that might make the player feel worse. After identifying helpful and unhelpful "coaching" statements, tell the adolescent, "You have a coach's voice in your head that talks to you in just the same way. What types of things does your coach say when you make a mistake?" Use the *For Children: Helpful Thinking/Good Coach, Bad Coach Worksheet* in Appendix E to

help you record these thoughts. Together discuss the concept of helpful vs. unhelpful thoughts and come to an agreement that the survivor should fire the "Bad Coach" voice and replace it with the "Good Coach" voice. Also discuss the adolescent's use of specific helpful and unhelpful self-statements and practice self-statement substitution.

As an alternative to the "coaching" example, ask a child or adolescent to talk about what advice he/she would give to another kid who was having a particular thought. Describe types of thoughts that another kid who had been through a similar disaster might have. Then ask whether each thought was helpful or unhelpful. For unhelpful thoughts, ask the survivor to come up with advice for the hypothetical kid that is a more positive, helpful way of thinking. You can also use the stick figures (drawn earlier) to help with this exercise.

Step 3: Rehearse Helpful Thoughts

After the survivor has identified some helpful thoughts, ask him/her to imagine the situation and practice saying the helpful thoughts out loud to counter the negative thoughts and emotions. This gives the survivor a chance to get used to the experience of deliberately replacing unhelpful thinking with helpful thoughts. It also provides you with an opportunity to see how well the survivor has understood the concept of helpful thinking. Tell the survivor that you do not expect him/her to completely believe these thoughts at this stage, but just to try out the helpful thoughts during the next few days and then decide if he/she is feeling a little bit better. Remind the survivor of how these new thoughts will help him/her make progress towards his/her goals.

For those survivors who are holding on to unhelpful thoughts, you may have to introduce other strategies:

- Use the *Payoff Matrix Worksheet* in Appendix E to help the survivor identify what he/she gains from continuing to hold the thought and what he/she might gain by giving up the thought.
- Use the *Problem-Solving Skill* to brainstorm other ways to reduce anxiety or to increase safety.
- Use both *Positive Activities Scheduling* and *Helpful Thinking* to distract the survivor from—and to limit the time spent thinking about—unhelpful thoughts.

Step 4: Assign Practice of Helpful Thoughts

Tell the survivor that the key to helpful thinking is to rehearse helpful thoughts during his/her daily life. Ask the survivor to identify a situation in which his/her unhelpful thinking is likely to occur. Then suggest that he/she picture being in that situation and practice replacing his/her negative thoughts with helpful thoughts. Reiterate that using these helpful thinking skills is like learning anything new; he/she will get better with practice. Encourage survivors to practice the helpful thinking skills daily. When they notice an unhelpful thought, tell them to deliberately replace it with a helpful thought. In addition, encourage them to keep the worksheets for future reference and practice. Remind survivors, especially children, to praise themselves when they test out this skill.

Testing Unhelpful Thoughts

For survivors who have trouble changing their thoughts, suggest that they "test" the unhelpful thought, to see whether it is accurate or not. For example, if the survivor believes that he/she cannot feel safe again, ask him/

her to test this belief over the next week by going into a situation in which he/she doesn't feel safe. This is a powerful way to see whether it is useful to think in a more realistic way.

When setting up a test with survivors, you will likely meet with resistance. In these instances, encourage survivors to try the task, even if it's a situation they have been avoiding for a long time. Together choose a small first step to make the task more manageable (e.g., staying at a place that triggers distress for a short time and then returning for longer periods, or gradually moving closer to the situation). As they take steps to accomplish the task, they will gather evidence that disproves the unhelpful thought and improves their confidence in testing further beliefs.

Developmental Alert

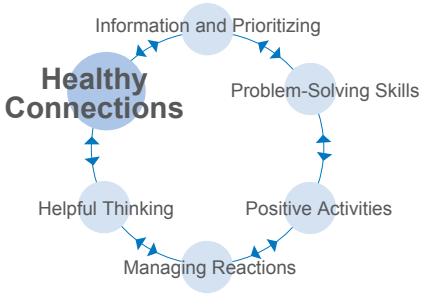
For children, you might frame this activity as "playing detective." Enlist the children's (and caregivers') help in picking up clues in their day-to-day lives. Discuss whether these clues support the unhelpful thought or indicate that there might be a better thought to use instead. Enlist the caregivers in this exercise to help children feel a greater sense of support and to help the adults counter some of their own unhelpful thoughts.

Follow-Up Session: Review Assignment

Follow-up with the survivor by asking whether he/she tried to use the Helpful Thinking skill from the last meeting and, if so, what happened. During the review, praise any efforts to practice helpful thinking. Include the following:

- Briefly review the rationale for helpful thinking and the unhelpful and helpful thoughts the survivor previously identified.
- The survivor's report on what happened when practicing helpful thoughts (if the survivor did not practice, explore the reasons for lack of follow-through and consider adapting and reassigning the practice). Did the survivor notice when unhelpful thoughts came to mind? Was he/she able to remember helpful thoughts to counteract the unhelpful ones? What were the effects of doing this?
- Did the survivor test the thought? If so, what happened and what did the survivor learn?
- If the helpful thinking method is working for the survivor, consider identifying another unhelpful thought and selecting helpful thoughts to replace it, asking him/her to rehearse the helpful thinking out loud, and then assigning more practice.

Skill 6:
Rebuilding Healthy Social Connections



Goal	To increase connections to positive relationships and community supports
Rationale	Social support from family, friends, and community members enhances recovery after a disaster by helping survivors meet their emotional and practical needs.
Use for	Survivors who express concerns about: • Feeling isolated or disconnected from friends or family • Disruptions to social or community networks • Feeling lonely • Living in a new environment • Feeling unappreciated or useless • Lacking confidence in themselves • Lacking access to community supports or resources • Lacking people to talk to about how they are feeling or what they are going through • How they can provide support to others in need
Time	20-30 Minutes
Handouts	Adults: *Social Connections List* *Social Connections Worksheet* *Giving Social Support in Six Steps* *Getting Social Support in Six Steps* *Types of Social Support Worksheet* Children: *For Children: Social Map Worksheet*
Skill Steps	After Explaining the Rationale for Rebuilding Health Social Connections: **1.** Develop a Social Connections Map **2.** Review the Social Connections Map **3.** Make a Social Support Plan

Explain the Rationale for Building Healthy Social Connections

Disasters can have a big impact on social connections. Often, survivors of disasters can experience major disruptions in their social support network (e.g., separations, lost contact, new living environment). They may want to talk about their experiences since the disaster, but not have anyone to listen, or they may have isolated themselves from their social or community networks. Because disaster can affect everyone in a person's network, survivors may have difficulty listening to someone else's "story" and end up avoiding people because their own stress makes them feel reluctant to be supportive. Additionally, reactions to disasters can affect relationships negatively (e.g., increased anger, frustration). Because of this, many disaster survivors are concerned about having limited social supports or a lack of connections.

It is easy to forget that the people we see every day can provide support, including family members (even children) or co-workers. If a survivor is afraid to "burden" people in his/her existing network with problems, or if he/she thinks that the current network is insufficient, he/she may need to expand it. As disasters typically include additional burdens and stresses, many survivors resist reaching out to others for mutual support because they feel too busy, overwhelmed, or resistant to taking on other people's burdens. If survivors have moved—either temporarily or permanently—they may not know how or where to begin looking for more support.

It is well known that survivors with positive social support recover more easily from disasters and are better prepared to face future challenges as they are recovering from the disaster. Building Healthy Social Connections aims to help survivors recognize that there may be people available to them whom they have not thought of or whom they have resisted approaching. Survivors can look to religious professionals, primary care doctors and healers, and past caregivers, and consider joining such groups as religious organizations, disaster recovery groups, yoga or meditation classes, choral groups, or sports clubs.

To explain the importance of social support, you may say:

Rationale	After a disaster, people often experience upsetting emotional and physical reactions that may affect their relationships with friends, neighbors, family members, and others in the community. The disaster may also separate you from people you care about, and impose lots of problems and hassles that take up your time and energy. After a disaster, connecting with others in beneficial ways can help you and others to: • Feel understood and cared for • Feel as if you fit in and belong • Feel needed and wanted • Feel as if you are NOT alone or isolated from the people you need and who need you • Build up your confidence that you can handle the problems you are facing • Feel reassured that others will be there for you • Get good advice when you are facing a difficult situation For these reasons, it can be helpful to focus on ways to improve your social support system.

Provider Alert

Survivors may have a harder time rebuilding their social support under certain conditions:

- If survivors have a pre-event social network that they have spent years and a great amount of energy building, honor the time and energy they have put in already. Support their decision as to how and when to pursue new relationships or find ways to reconnect with those established supports.
- If survivors have had a loved one die in the disaster, grief may be playing a role in their recovery and interfering with social support. You might begin with the *Managing Reactions* module to address the grief and feelings of distress. Do not push survivors to engage in social connections before they feel ready to do so.
- If survivors have a history of making poor choices in their relationships, connecting to people who are unreliable, exploitive, and physically abusive, they may continue this pattern in new relationships. When you think this may be the case, consider using the *Rebuilding Social Connections* module as an opportunity to examine this pattern and possibly change it or to make a referral for treatment.

Developmental Alert

Remember that children maintain social connections and deal with intense physiological and emotional reactions through their play. After a disaster, however, children may disengage from play and mimic the energy and posture of their caregivers, who may appear slowed down, slumped, depressed, or have a "deer in the headlights" expression. These reactions are common after an overwhelming event, so help adults understand that playing with others is important for the recovery of young children. Parents and caregivers should find opportunities for and encourage their children to play in small groups. Caregivers can help guide children's play to be constructive and not focused on replaying the disaster.

One way to highlight the importance of social connections is to illustrate how connectedness has been important throughout history, by saying that humans have frequently come together after life-changing events. Help survivors understand that wanting to be close to others after disasters is as common as losing those connections due to the additional demands of rebuilding one's life. You can use the following story or modify it to incorporate the culture or rituals of the survivors:

Rationale	For thousands of years humans have faced life-changing events. In the "early days," these events would have included tribes coming together to celebrate a successful harvest or a major solar-lunar event, coming together to mourn the loss of hunters killed during the hunt or tribal members killed during natural disasters and wars, or coming together to bid their farewell to a place before moving on. Life-changing events in our time include births, children coming of age and moving away, marriage, career moves and promotions, retirement, and of course significant changes after disasters, especially the sudden death of a loved one. During all of these events, normal human instinct usually brings people into groups to support one another, to tell their story about the event and how it will change their lives, and to cook food and stay together, sometimes for many

Rationale (cont.)	days—as with an extended family or tribe that shares actively in carrying the burden or celebrating the joy of life-changing events. We know that with the extended adversity often occurring after a disaster, and the stress people grapple with, social support is sometimes less available. Tired and overwhelmed with ongoing changes, over time people may begin to reduce their social connections with and support for each other. This is the core idea behind asking you to build your social connection map and plan. After life-changing events, humans have different ways of coming together, in groups and in pairs. The important thing is that *you have a choice* in how you will come together with the people, places, and activities that can support you, given your life-changing event. Does this make sense? [Allow for discussion at this point, before developing the Social Connections Map. You might ask survivors if they would be willing to talk about the social gathering traditions of their family or culture when faced with life changing events.]

Culture Alert

This is a good time to address cultural issues, as different cultures interpret life-changing events in varying ways and incorporate different rituals to honor/respect/commemorate the life change. After a disaster, people want to be with others, to share their strengths and sorrows. Humans have many different traditions of how to come together in groups and in pairs, so remind survivors that they have a choice in how to connect with others for support.

Step 1: Develop a Social Connections Map

Explain that the first step in rebuilding healthy connections is to identify who is currently in the survivor's network. The most accessible person is not necessarily the one who lives the closest. Many survivors connect with loved ones and friends by telephone, email, online social networks, and instant messaging. When you start this process, survivors may remember individuals with whom they have lost touch because of the disaster, so explain that part of this exercise is to see if there are ways to regain some of those connections. The goal of this exercise is to allow survivors to see the "big picture" of those with whom they are connected and what those connections mean to them. Go over creating the Social Connections Map:

Instructions	There is no right or wrong way to make your map—it is your story of your social network. You do not have to be an artist to do this. In fact, if you do not want to draw out your map, we can "talk out" your map and I will make notes or a list or draw it for you. Using paper and pens or crayons, let's map out your most important social connections and relationships. You'll be able to see the "big picture" of people or resources you are connected to and what those connections mean to you.

Instructions (cont.)	For instance, you can think of all your relationships as your social "atom" or social "solar system" with you at the center of the atom or solar system and all your social connections revolving around you at different times and at different distances. You will use this map and the *Social Connections Worksheet* (in Appendix F) to create a plan to identify: **1.** Who is currently in your network **2.** Whom you want to seek out **3.** Whom you may want to temporarily spend less time with **4.** How to improve your existing relationships You will start with the people who are most important and easiest to connect with at the moment. Start with people in your family or community, and then add people with whom you mainly communicate by phone, text, or email. You can include individuals, groups, or organizations if you'd like.

Ask if the survivor has any questions, comments, or concerns about doing the Social Connections Map.

Alternative method for children:

Families, parents, and caregivers can work with their children to create the map, allowing them to share their experience and their important relationships. Give adolescents the choice to do this alone or with caregivers.

Provider Alert

Some survivors will have difficulty staying in the present while doing social mapping and some may focus on losses (deaths of loved ones, friends who have moved away, or people with whom they've lost contact). Gently help them to refocus on people in the here and now. If they seem unable to do this, it may help to take a break and use the *Managing Reactions* module.

After giving the survivor paper and pen to complete the map, ask him/her to start filling it in. If the survivor is struggling to complete it, show an example of a Social Connections Map, or read the *Social Connections List* in Appendix F to remind the survivor of people that might be available to him/her right now.

Address any questions and comments that arise when reviewing the list. Encourage the survivor to add his/her examples of social connections. Some survivors who have been extremely stressed or isolated may have forgotten who is in their network. Showing them the list or asking about those they have relied on in the past might help them to expand their map.

Step 2: Review the Social Connections Map

Once the map is complete, use it to help the survivor assess what support is currently available and what support he/she has to seek out. Use the *Social Connections Worksheet* in Appendix F. Ask him/her to review the map and tell you more about the different supports he/she has listed. You may say:

Reviewing the Social Connections Map	Now that we have identified who is on your map, let's look at how those on your list/map provide you with support. We will use this worksheet to help us. There are different types of support. We want to do social things with some people, while we want others to listen to us when we are sad. Let's take a look at what role each of our supports provides. Use the worksheet to identify the following: • Who are your most important connections right now? • With whom can you share your experiences or feelings? • Who can make you feel more like you fit in and belong? • Whom can you get advice from to help you with your recovery? • Whom do you want to spend time with socially in the next couple of weeks? • Who might need your help or support right now? • Who can help build your confidence that you can handle problems? • Who can provide you with practical help? On the worksheet, write down the types of support each person can give you.

Once the survivor has identified who is currently available and the type of support each provides, identify what is missing or who is not currently accessible. You may say:

Identifying What Is Missing on the Social Connections Map	Now we have a good sense of whom you can turn to and who can give you different types of support. Sometimes we need additional supports to get us through these challenging times, or we want to reconnect with those with whom we've lost contact. On this part of the worksheet, let's identify what is missing or needs to be changed in your network. Use the worksheet to identify the following: • Are there different types of supports that are missing (e.g., someone to listen to you, to help you with advice, help with the additional responsibilities, to do things socially)? • Are there loved ones or friends with whom you are not currently connected, but want to be? • With whom do you want to spend more time? • With whom do you want to spend less time? • Are there some relationships that need improving? • Are their ways you want to help others? • Do you want to increase your social activities or give to others by joining a community group? Write down on the worksheet areas that you want to change. [The objective is not necessarily to ask all of these questions, but to learn what the survivor needs to improve his/her current social connections.]

Step 3: Make a Social Support Plan

Now identify one area the survivor needs to change to improve his/her social connections, and form a plan to make the needed changes in the next couple of days or weeks. Here is some guidance on how to develop the plan based on what the survivor identified as needing to change:

- For survivors needing additional supports, different types of supports, or wanting to increase their connectedness to the community (e.g., including helping children entering a new school), use the problem-solving skill.
- For survivors who need to change existing relationships that are harmful to their recovery, use the problem-solving and/or managing reaction skills.
- For survivors who have trouble identifying people in their network, use the *Types of Social Support Worksheet* in Appendix F to help them look at the different types of social support that they need, or can give.
- For survivors with a limited network who do not know how to get support, review the *Getting Social Support in Six Steps* handout in Appendix F before making a plan.
- For survivors who want to support others but don't know how, review the *Giving Social Support in Six Steps* handout in Appendix F and then make a plan.
- For survivors wanting to increase social activities, consider using both problem-solving and scheduling positive activities.

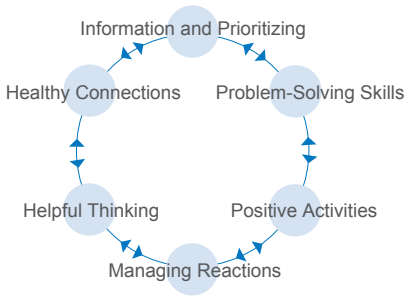
Write down the plan on the worksheet. Make sure the action plan is concrete and indicates specifically what the survivor should do and when he/she should do it. Make sure the survivor clearly understands the action plan. Ask what help or direction he/she might need to initiate the plan, such as suggesting writing in his/her calendar specific steps to connect to the social supports identified.

Follow-Up: Review Assignment

Determine whether the survivor tried to activate his/her social connections plan. If so, what happened and what were the effects? During the review, praise any efforts to activate the plan. The discussion should include three issues:

- A brief review of the rationale for rebuilding the healthy social connections identified previously.
- What happened when the survivor tried the plan? (If the survivor did not activate it, explore the reasons why, and consider making adjustments and reassigning it.) Did he/she not have the skills to perform the plan or did other barriers come up? Address these issues accordingly and modify the plan.
- If the social connection plan is working for the survivor, consider taking on another change needed in his/her social connections. Ask the survivor to make another plan, and activate it before your next meeting.

Multiple Contacts: Applying SPR Skills, Enhancing Motivation, and Preventing Setbacks



If you have more than one contact with survivors, you may use additional meetings to: (a) help the survivor apply SPR skills to current problems; (b) help motivate the survivor to continue putting SPR skills into practice; and (c) prevent setbacks after the survivor has completed the sessions.

Applying SPR Skills: Steps for Follow-Up Visits

When you see a survivor for follow-up visits, you will be able to check on how he/she has used the previously learned SPR skill since your last visit, and whether to continue using this skill or teach a new one. Although each module has specific guidance on how to conduct follow-up visits, here are general considerations for any follow-up contact:

1. Review the last contact and use of the SPR skill taught during the last contact.
2. Decide whether to continue working with this SPR skill or introduce a new SPR skill.
3. Review the plan for future follow-up visits.

1. Review the Last Contact and the Survivor's Use of SPR Skills

At the follow-up visit, recap the previous meeting and what happened since to:

- Re-emphasize the steps of the SPR skill taught in the previous visit.
- Determine whether the survivor needs additional help in understanding and/or using the SPR skill.
- Identify any new problem to which to apply the SPR skill.
- Determine whether a new SPR skill should be taught.

To remind a survivor of the steps of an SPR skill, you may say:

Reviewing SPR Skill Steps	Last time, we used the problem-solving skill to address _____. Remember, this was a simple four-step method: (1) Define the Problem and Decide Ownership, (2) Set the Goal, (3) Brainstorm, and (4) Evaluate and Choose the Best Solutions. Looking at your worksheet, you had made this plan to use the skill to address your problem and I'd like to hear how things worked out.

Determine whether the survivor tried to apply the skill and, if so, what happened and what the process was like for him/her. Praise the survivor for any attempts to test out the skill. Ask what steps he/she tried and if there were any problems carrying out the steps. If you gave handouts, ask if he/she used any of the "tips" and, if so, how the tips worked. If they did not work, ask how he/she used the tips to see if there are any other tips that might work better.

Ask the survivor whether using the SPR skill improved things or the way he/she feels. This key question may help the survivor realize the positive effects of using the SPR skill(s) and motivate him/her to continue to use the skill(s) in the future.

If the survivor did not try applying the skill, explore the reasons. Ask whether the SPR skill makes sense to him/her, stress the importance of taking action and of following through with the action plan to use the skill, and encourage practicing the skill. You might say:

Encouraging SPR Skill Practice	I understand that it can be difficult to use what we discussed last time, with all that is going on in your life. Tell me a little about what got in the way. [Probe in order to get information for applying the skill differently or introducing another SPR skill.] You might suggest: • People sometimes don't use the SPR skills because they don't want to think about what happened to them or what they have to face. Was this what happened with you? OR: Sometimes people fear that using these skills might bring up negative feelings. Were you concerned about that? *If yes:* Explain that you can teach some skills to help him/her to better manage the reactions, and reassure him/her that directly addressing the problems or reactions works better and sooner than avoiding them. • Sometimes people find that they want to apply these skills but just don't have the time. Was that true for you? *If yes:* One way to help that is to plan ahead, to actually pick a time each day when you will use the skill. That way, you don't get to the end of the day and realize that you forgot to do it. • Other times people may forget until right before we get together again. When you thought about coming today, did you suddenly remember the plan? *If yes:* Don't worry, that means we need to make sure this is the right skill for you. If it is, scheduling time each day to use the skill will help. If it's not, we'll try a different skill.

2. Continue Use of the Same SPR Skill or Teach a New One

If the survivor had success in using the SPR skill, ask if there are any additional problems that using this SPR skill might address. Use his/her feelings of accomplishment to address other problems. Refer back to the information you gathered in the initial contact to see if the survivor's priorities are still the same, or ask which problem(s) he/she currently considers most important. You may say:

Continuing Use of an SPR Skill	Great! You've been able to use the problem-solving skill to accomplish one of your goals. You also mentioned last week that you had some difficulty with _____. Would you like to use the *Problem-Solving Worksheet* to make a plan to address this?

If the SPR skill was not helpful, or the survivor encountered difficulty in using the skill, work with the survivor to decide how best to practice or use the skill. You may say:

Adjusting Use of an SPR Skill	You said you felt that the breathing skill wasn't working as well for you as you wanted it to. Why do you think that is? *After he/she answers:* This skill works best with repeated practice. It is hard to use the breathing skill under stress unless you have already practiced it repeatedly at non-stressful times. What specific times of day did you try it? Can you practice it when it is less stressful? How about right when you wake up, after your shower, during a lunch break, or before bedtime?

Decide if you should select an additional SPR skill for this or a new problem area. Again, return to the information you gathered at the first contact to identify other problems for which additional SPR skills might be helpful, particularly if the survivor feels that the initial skill has helped him/her resolve some of the presenting problem. Alternatively, teach a new SPR skill to address obstacles that came up while practicing the previous skill(s). For instance, addressing unhelpful fearful thoughts or reducing low energy by scheduling positive activities can help motivate a survivor towards more active problem-solving. You may say:

Introducing a New SPR Skill	It sounds as if you've had some difficulty scheduling positive activities because you feel you don't deserve to have any positive experiences when others around you are suffering. I think we should address that feeling with a new skill called helpful thinking. Let me tell you why helpful thinking is important after disasters.

3. Review a Plan for Further Sessions

Whether you will meet with the survivor again will depend on many factors, such as how motivated the survivor is, how much time he/she has for more SPR meetings, how well the SPR skills are working for him/her, and how helpful you think continued application of SPR skills will be for addressing his/her problems. When determining how many contacts to schedule, do not plan too much for each visit. Teach one skill well and leave the door open for future contact. Do not overload the survivor.

If the survivor agrees to meet again, review what you covered in the meeting and go over his/her new action plan. You might find the skills worksheets helpful. Always encourage the survivor to use the skills he/she has learned to address any problems that come up between meetings. Ask him/her to practice the skills on a regular basis, if possible. Emphasize that regular practice will help him/her use the skills more effectively. Identify specific times and places where the skills will be most useful.

Finally, reconfirm the number of visits left with the survivor and discuss the rationale for engaging in this number of contacts.

Increasing Motivation to Use the SPR Skill

If the survivor has difficulty implementing SPR skills, consider ways to increase his/her motivation. People are most likely to change their behavior when they are the ones making the decision and choosing the plan for change. With this in mind: (1) clarify problem areas, while expressing empathy; (2) identify any discrepancy between the survivor's current situation and the wishes, goals, and needs he/she has for the future; and (3) support self-efficacy.

1. Clarify Problem Areas with Empathy

Expressing empathy involves helping the survivor think through areas of concern in a way that shows warmth, understanding, and positive regard. Try to be impartial. Demonstrate your understanding by checking in with the survivor and reflecting his/her concerns. Use open-ended questions to encourage elaboration. Seek permission before you ask questions or give advice. Try to see the situation from the survivor's point of view and let him/her know that it is normal to feel ambivalent. While doing the above, try to determine the answers to the following questions:

- Does the survivor feel the need to learn the skill?
- Does the survivor feel confident that he/she will be able to use the skill?

If the obstacle to using the skill is that the survivor is not making it a top priority, help the survivor clarify his/her own values about its importance. Do this by asking about other priorities in his/her life which may interfere with making this skill a priority. Another method is to ask for more information, such as, "What would need to happen for this skill to become more important for you?"

If it seems that the obstacle to using the skill is the survivor's lack of confidence in his/her ability to put it into practice, increase his/her confidence by making affirming statements, such as:

- "I see that _____ (for example: your family, taking care of yourself, feeling better) is really important to you."
- "You seem to be a very strong person. You have had many difficulties in your life, and yet you have managed to cope with them."

Also, ask about previous success in taking steps or overcoming similar obstacles, even if they are not related to the skill in question. For instance, "Tell me about a time when you had to deal with another difficult situation in your life. What did you do and how did you do it? How did it make you feel?" Helping survivors remember

that they do have the power to put SPR skills into use can give them confidence to take on their problems. Asking future-oriented questions can increase confidence as well. You might say, “Imagine that you are now totally confident that you can do this. What has happened to give you that confidence?”

2. Identify Discrepancies

Encourage the survivor to describe how his/her current situation differs from his/her ideal situation and goals. Looking at such a discrepancy can increase motivation to work on reducing it and also encourage the use of the SPR skill.

Another strategy is to point out the negative consequences of continuing without using the SPR skill. The awareness of the negative consequences should come from the survivor, not from you. Use the *Payoff Matrix Worksheet* (see Appendix E)—a list of the good things and bad things about using the skills—to help the survivor weigh the reasons for using the skill against continuing without it. Write the reasons against using the skill on one side and those for using it on the other, and then compare them. You may say:

Identifying Discrepancies in Behaviors and Goals	You undoubtedly have some very good reasons why you might decide not to _____, and you have already expressed some of them. Let’s debate them: I’ll take the position that I don’t need to _____. Your job is to convince me that I should.

While discussing the Payoff Matrix, you may get some resistance. Avoid arguing by reflecting back his/her ambivalence and reluctance to use the SPR skill. Ask open-ended questions to help the survivor generate ideas about the problem and what he/she needs to do to help solve it. For example, if the survivor is resisting scheduling more positive activities, like spending time on the porch to interact with neighbors, you might say:

- Would you be willing to tell me what you are doing or thinking about when you stay inside?
- It sounds as if you are might be nervous about interacting with neighbors. That’s understandable, given what you’ve been through.
- What are you “getting” by staying inside?
- What’s the down-side of not going out on the porch more often?
- If you didn’t stay inside, what do you think might happen? How would things be different?
- Are there some ways you could feel less nervous—be a bit more comfortable—while spending more time out on the porch?

3. Support Self-Efficacy

Elicit suggestions from the survivor for putting the SPR skill into practice by having him/her decide on the steps in the plan as much as possible. Just as talking about the reasons for using SPR skills can increase a survivor’s desire to try them, talking through the steps of an action plan can increase his/her confidence in putting the plan into action. Use the worksheets to help the survivor remember the plan.

After discussing the plan, ask, “Is this what you want to do?” If he/she seems reluctant or unsure, do not push the survivor into saying “yes.” Reluctance may mean that you have rushed him/her into a decision, or it may mean that the survivor needs more confidence. Try to come up with a version of the plan that he/she wants and feels that he/she can accomplish. You may also suggest a “trial run” of the action plan that the survivor can do for a short period of time.

Preventing Setbacks

Help survivors understand that if they continue to put the SPR skills into practice they will see further gains. Explain that you realize there will be difficult days or periods in their life that will make using the skills more difficult. To help survivors use the SPR skills during these difficult times, use the following steps to prevent setbacks:

1. Summarize the survivor’s work with SPR.
2. Help the survivor have realistic expectations for progress.
3. Identify “early warning signs” and make a plan to address these signs.

1. Summarize the Survivor’s Progress

Review what you covered and acknowledge the gains the survivor has made. If appropriate, you and/or the survivor can make notes so that he/she has a reminder to refer to later. Summarizing SPR work includes talking about goals, content, and achievements.

- **Goals.** Review the original goals of your work together, what you and the survivor set out to achieve. Ask the survivor to think back to what he/she had hoped for at the first meeting. If you recorded the survivor’s goals at your first contact, remind him/her of them. If the goals changed over the course of your work together, discuss this, too.
- **Content.** Review your work together, including the skills you taught and the rationale for each. So that the survivor does not feel you are giving him/her a test, say what was done rather than ask. For example, “First, we spent time solving some of the problems you had, and then we talked about the importance of thoughts and how they affect your feelings.” Once you have outlined what was done and why, check that the survivor agrees with your summary and ask if he/she would add anything. Also ask what the survivor found least and most helpful.
- **Achievements.** Ask the survivor about the course of your work together. What has he/she achieved? What has changed for the better? Refer back to the original goals and comment on the progress made on each goal. As the survivor lists them, reinforce each achievement by agreeing and asking for specific examples that support that progress. Have a list of the survivor’s achievements (that you prepared before the contact) and check to see if you are both in agreement. For example, you might say:

Summarizing Progress	We have done a lot in these few meetings together! Today will be the last time we meet, so let's take a few minutes to remember all the new things that you learned. First, we spent some time learning about the common reactions to disaster, many of which you've experienced yourself. Then you learned an important breathing skill for managing your anxious reactions. I've been pleased about how you practiced the breathing and how you've used it in other situations when you felt anxious. In what situations has it been most helpful to you? You also learned a skill for helping with bad mood and low energy—doing positive activities—even if you don't feel like it. You were great. You scheduled more (name activities). How has that been helpful for you? Finally, you learned about helpful thinking and how your feelings of fear were connected to unhelpful thoughts. By changing to more helpful thoughts, you learned to improve your mood. As we've worked together, I've been impressed by your ability to identify and change your thoughts. What stands out as the most positive change for you? Is there anything that you want to make sure we do during this last meeting?

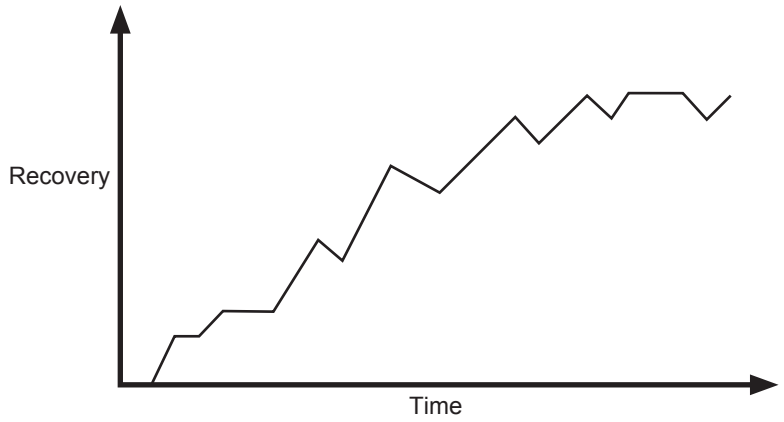
Developmental Alert

Be careful not to underestimate the level of attachment children may feel for their provider after only a few contacts. Take a little time for closure, so that the child can say good-bye and express feelings (of sadness or worry), and you say how much you enjoyed your time together and how you will remember him/her. For some, this may mean a simple handshake, while others may want to spend a few minutes drawing pictures for each other. Consider giving the child something tangible, such as a Certificate of Completion or a photograph of you together.

2. Set Realistic Expectations of Progress

Discuss the concept of "recovery" with the survivor. Ensure that he/she understands that recovery is a gradual process, that it is not smooth, and that it is normal to have good days and bad days. You might describe recovery as "when there are more good days than bad days." Point out that it is usual to have reminders and reactions and other problems during recovery, especially on occasions such as the anniversary of the disaster.

Explain the concept of a "setback"—a period of time when some reactions happen again. Emphasize that recovery is a gradual process and that setbacks are common. Draw a graph to demonstrate the gradual nature of recovery, as shown below. Also using the graph, encourage the survivor to think about the big picture, that the course of recovery is uphill, even though there is some temporary backsliding. Rather than comparing one day to the next, it is more helpful (particularly on low days) to think about how many gains have been made since the first meeting.



You might use an analogy of someone who learns to eat correctly and loses weight and then goes off the diet and gains back some weight. This does not mean that the whole diet was a waste. If someone has a temporary slip, he/she should not give up. The same is true for recovery. The survivor can keep on using the skills just as one can go back on a diet. Have a child think about something that he/she has learned successfully, like how to ride a bike. Remind the child about getting better and better at it, even though he/she may have fallen off the bike a few times. The important thing is to get back on the bike and practice until you get it right.

3. Identify and Plan for "Early Warning Signs"

Ask the survivor to think about upcoming situations that may trigger a setback, a time when there will be reminders of the original trauma, disaster, or loss. Point out that he/she will be more vulnerable to a setback when other things are not going well. Use the *Preventing Setbacks Worksheet* in Appendix G to make a list of these high-risk situations, including hearing about similar events in the news, or experiencing stressful times (changing jobs or schools, taking a test, moving, family illness, financial problems) or facing the anniversary of the disaster.

Having identified possible situations that may trigger a setback, the survivor should also be aware of early warning signs that he/she is having a setback. Encourage the survivor to regularly monitor how he/she is doing, especially during high-risk situations. Has he/she been thinking about the disaster? Avoiding activities or situations? Feeling anxious or fearful? Explain that these may be early warning signs of a setback. Some people first notice having trouble sleeping or feeling on guard. Early warning signs may be thoughts, emotions, behaviors, physical reactions, or trouble in daily life. Help the survivor make a list of early warning signs to refer to in the future.

Then, use the *Preventing Setbacks Worksheet* to help the survivor make an action plan for how to address early warning signs in the future. Discuss the survivor's choice of skills, prompting as needed. You might say:

Making an Action Plan	Let's take a few minutes to think about what skills you have for the challenging situations that may come up in the future. You've identified three situations that may cause you to feel anxious. What skills have you learned that might help most? One thing you have learned is a new breathing skill. Before you face your challenging situation and while you're in the situation, you can focus on your breathing to decrease your anxiety. What else might you do? You can use your helpful thinking skills to change your thoughts about the situation before it happens. Or you might consider asking someone for support. You've identified a number of people on your social map that can possibly help you. You can also review your worksheets from time to time. They are a summary of everything we did together. Now, let's write down these ideas for an "early warning sign" action plan. You have done a fantastic job learning these skills. However, like any other skill, such as drawing, playing a sport, or even driving a car, you get better—and it comes more naturally—with practice. Many people continue to improve after SPR is over. Keep practicing the SPR skills that you've learned until it becomes more natural and automatic, and you will be prepared when you run into difficult times.

Although you will need to tailor the action plan to the individual, below is an example of a possible plan.

My Action Plan

1. Review what I did in the SPR meetings and all my achievements.
2. Remember that everyone has a bad day now and then, and that "My progress is NOT all blown."
3. Monitor my thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to find out if I'm having any early warning signs.
4. Use the strategies I learned (especially the most helpful ones) to address the warning signs. If the strategies don't work right away, I'll try again later or the next day.
5. Ask someone to remind me or help me with the skills I've learned.
6. If I do all the steps above for a reasonable amount of time and I'm not feeling better, I will get further counseling.

SKILLS FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL RECOVERY

Worksheets and Handouts

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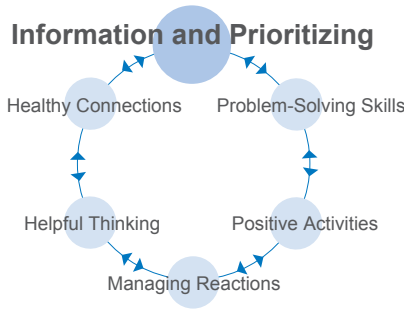
Appendix A: Gathering Information and Prioritizing Assistance



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SPR Screening Form

Problem Area	How Much of a Problem?
Physical Health: Do you have any concerns about your own or a family member's physical health? (Describe) _____	☐ Urgent ☐ Important but not urgent ☐ Not important ☐ Other _____
Emotional Difficulties: Do you have any concerns about how you or a family member are coping emotionally? (Describe) _____	☐ Urgent ☐ Important but not urgent ☐ Not important ☐ Other _____
Safety: Do you have any concerns for your own or your family's safety right now or in the future? (Describe) _____	☐ Urgent ☐ Important but not urgent ☐ Not important ☐ Other _____
Basic Necessities: Do you have concerns about meeting the basic necessities of daily life? (Describe) _____	☐ Urgent ☐ Important but not urgent ☐ Not important ☐ Other _____
Substance Use/Abuse: Do you have any concerns about your own or a family member's use of alcohol, drugs, or prescription medications? (Describe) _____	☐ Urgent ☐ Important but not urgent ☐ Not important ☐ Other _____
Role Functioning: Do you have any concerns about how well you are functioning in your daily life at home, work, or school? (Describe) _____	☐ Urgent ☐ Important but not urgent ☐ Not important ☐ Other _____
Interpersonal Life: Do you have any concerns about how you are getting along with people—your spouse/partner, family members, neighbors, friends, or people at work or school? (Describe) _____	☐ Urgent ☐ Important but not urgent ☐ Not important ☐ Other _____
Other Concerns: Is there anything else that you are concerned about or want to share with me? (Describe) _____	☐ Urgent ☐ Important but not urgent ☐ Not important ☐ Other _____

SPR Skill Flowchart

CONCERN	PRIMARY SPR SKILL	SECONDARY SPR SKILLS
Having a difficult problem that I need to solve.	PROBLEM-SOLVING	HEALTHY SOCIAL CONNECTIONS HELPFUL THINKING
Having intense or repeatedly upsetting reactions to things that happen.	MANAGING REACTIONS	HEALTHY SOCIAL CONNECTIONS HELPFUL THINKING
Not knowing how to connect or re-connect with friends and family after the disaster. Not having enough people that care about me or can help me out.	HEALTHY SOCIAL CONNECTIONS	POSITIVE ACTIVITIES HELPFUL THINKING
Feeling depressed, sad, or withdrawn.	POSITIVE ACTIVITIES	PROBLEM-SOLVING HEALTHY SOCIAL CONNECTIONS
Having upsetting thoughts that make me feel bad or stop me from having more positive thoughts.	HELPFUL THINKING	MANAGING REACTIONS ACTIVITY SCHEDULING
Having a serious physical health problem, a serious mental health condition, a serious substance abuse problem, and/or significant current hardships and adversities.	PROBLEM-SOLVING (with a focus on referral to the appropriate services)	HEALTHY SOCIAL CONNECTIONS HELPFUL THINKING

What Is "Skills for Psychological Recovery?"

Skills for Psychological Recovery (SPR) is a program to assist survivors in reducing post-disaster distress and moving forward in their lives. SPR uses handouts and worksheets to aid in the teaching of SPR skills. While survivors can use them on their own, the SPR handouts are most helpful when used in meetings with a counselor. The counselor can provide support and give suggestions for handling any issues that come up while the survivor learns and practices the skills in the handouts.

SPR teaches five main skills:

- **Building Problem-Solving Skills.** Survivors have continuing problems and ongoing adversities resulting from a disaster that can add significantly to their stress level, distract from self-care, and increase traumatic stress reactions. You will learn new skills to cope with any current or anticipated problems. Problem-solving skills give you a tool to break these problems down into more manageable chunks, give you a range of ways to respond, and help you thoughtfully decide what actions to take.
- **Promoting Positive Activities.** After a disaster, it is very common for people to stop doing things that used to be enjoyable, rewarding, or personally meaningful. People often become depressed or withdrawn when they no longer engage in pleasurable activities. You will make a plan to increase meaningful and positive activities in your schedule, to build your resilience, and to bring more fulfillment and enjoyment into your life.
- **Managing Reactions.** When people have been exposed to extreme stress and fear as a result of disaster, their bodies are often on alert and ready for danger. Even relaxing your body can make you feel too vulnerable. In the absence of real danger, these reactions are unnecessary and may have bad effects on your health, mood, and relationships. You will learn tools to better manage distressing physical and emotional reactions and how to put them into practice in your daily life to reduce anxiety and stress. You may also learn how to think through any memories that are especially troubling, so you can understand them better and master them more successfully.
- **Promoting Helpful Thinking.** After disaster, people's thoughts about the world and themselves often change. It is common for survivors to see the world as dangerous, have difficulty trusting other people, or see themselves as unable to cope. In order for people to change their emotional reactions, they need to change the way they think about the things that happen to them. You will learn how your thoughts influence your emotions, become aware of what you're saying to yourself, and replace negative thoughts with more helpful thoughts (which will lead to more positive emotions).
- **Building Healthy Social Connections.** Social support is one of the most consistently identified protective factors in studies of disaster survivors. Often the best way to cope is to have other people to talk and do things with. Disasters can result in people feeling isolated and alone. It can feel impossible to build new, or reestablish existing, relationships. This module will help you learn how to more effectively *seek support* and *give support* to others.

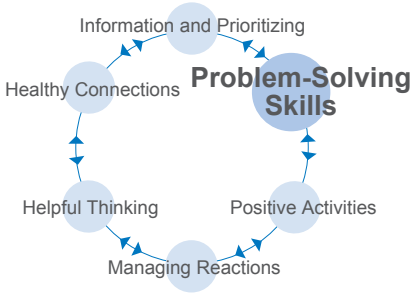
The goal of SPR is to teach you new ways to deal with all the changes resulting from the disaster by exploring new actions, thoughts, and ways to respond. Even if you are not able to change your situation, once you have learned the SPR skills you can change the way you think about and react to it, reduce your distress, and improve your resilience. If you meet with your counselor more than once, your counselor may suggest that you practice your new skills between visits. Practicing new skills can help you feel better faster. During follow-up visits, you can check in with your counselor about anything that seems difficult or needs adjustment.

Skills for Psychological Recovery Overview and Review of Skills

Skill	Goals	Rationale	Steps
Gathering Information and Prioritizing Assistance	• To gather information to determine if there is a need for immediate referral within your agency or to other services • To understand the survivor's most pressing needs and concerns • To prioritize and plan SPR intervention strategies	In the post-disaster period, survivors often deal with ongoing distress and may need assistance with immediate or long-term medical or mental health conditions, be faced with a range of hardships and adversities, have concerns about safety, and experience difficulties in interpersonal interaction and role functioning. Gathering information is the first step in assisting survivors to identify and prioritize their current needs and concerns in order to address them.	After explaining the rationale for information gathering: **1.** Identify current needs and concerns **2.** Prioritize areas to address **3.** Make an action plan
Building Problem-Solving Skills	• To help survivors to prioritize and solve difficulties or problems	Disasters often create many difficulties that can make survivors feel helpless or even immobilized in the face of numerous problems. Ongoing stress and pressures to "do something" can make it hard to step back and think effectively about the best way to handle a situation. Having a systematic way to solve problems can help survivors address problems more effectively, regain a sense of control, and increase their self-efficacy.	After explaining the rationale for problem-solving: **1.** Define the problem/decide ownership **2.** Set the goal **3.** Brainstorm **4.** Evaluate and choose the best solutions
Promoting Positive Activities	• To help survivors plan and engage in positive, pleasurable, or meaningful activities to improve their mood and regain a sense control	Disasters often disrupt normal routines and activities that provide a sense of purpose, control, and pleasure. When survivors identify, schedule, and engage in positive, pleasurable, or meaningful activities, it helps them reestablish routines, improve their mood, and restore a sense of control.	After explaining the rationale for engaging in positive activities: **1.** Identify and plan one or more activities **2.** Schedule activities in a calendar

Skill	Goals	Rationale	Steps
Managing Reactions	• To enhance skills to calm upsetting physical and emotional reactions • Learn new strategies to deal with reactions to stressful situations, including reminders • Put words to difficult experiences to better understand and manage distress	Disaster survivors may experience upsetting physical and emotional reactions that often arise in confronting disaster-related experiences and reminders of the disaster, as well as ongoing stress or life changes. These reactions can adversely affect mood, decision-making, interpersonal life, daily functioning, and physical health. Learning skills to address and manage these reactions can help protect physical and mental health, improve self-confidence, enhance interpersonal and role functioning, and reduce maladaptive attempts at coping.	After explaining the rationale for learning how to manage distressing reactions: **1.** Identify distressing reactions and their triggers **2.** Teach skills to address distressing reactions **3.** Create a plan to manage a reaction
Promoting Helpful Thinking	• To help survivors identify what they are saying to themselves about the disaster experience or their current situation • To help survivors choose less distressing ways of thinking • **NOTE:** Helpful thinking is not *positive thinking*. Negative thoughts may be accurate ("The government let us down"), but these thoughts are likely to create helplessness and distress vs. thinking more helpful thoughts ("Life isn't fair, but I can get through it with some help").	Many survivors struggle with distressing disaster-related thoughts as they try to adjust to post-disaster circumstances. These negative thoughts help maintain negative emotions such as fear, hopelessness, anger, anxiety, sadness, and guilt. Identifying and practicing more helpful ways of thinking can improve mood and reduce the intensity of distressing emotional and physical reactions.	After explaining the rationale for helpful thinking: **1.** Identify unhelpful thoughts **2.** Identify helpful thoughts **3.** Rehearse helpful thoughts **4.** Assign practice of helpful thoughts
Building Healthy Social Connections	• To increase connections to positive relationships and to community supports	Social support from family, friends, and community members enhances recovery after a disaster by helping survivors meet their emotional and practical needs.	After explaining the rationale for healthy social connections: **1.** Develop a social connections map **2.** Review the social connections map **3.** Make a social support plan

Appendix B:
Building Problem-Solving Skills Worksheets



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Problem-Solving Worksheet

The problem-solving skill helps you break down overwhelming sets of problems into more manageable chunks, prioritize which to work on first, and decide what action is best to take.

1. DEFINE THE PROBLEM: What is the problem you want to work on first?
If you need to choose from several problems, ask yourself, "Which one of these areas is bothering me the most? Is there one that I need to deal with sooner than the other ones? Is there one that is getting worse? What do I feel most comfortable working on first?" State the problem clearly. If it is a complex problem, write down one "chunk" you can work on first.

Take a minute to ask yourself these questions about the problem:

A.	Is it happening to me?	Yes	No
B.	Is it happening between me and someone else?	Yes	No
C.	Is it happening to someone else?	Yes	No
D.	Is it happening between two or more other people?	Yes	No

(If you circled "yes" to A or B, this is likely a good problem for you to work on. If you circled "yes" to C or D, this may not be a problem you can fix, but a situation for someone else to work on.)

2. SET THE GOAL: What do you want and need? What do you hope to see happen?

3. BRAINSTORM: What are some possible options to meet your goal?
Try to come up with five to 10 options.

4. CHOOSE THE BEST SOLUTION: Combine your best options into a solution.
Make a plan of committing to it in the days ahead.

Put it into action!

Give it a try. If it doesn't work out, you can always try other options.

For Children: Problem Busters Worksheet

Is there something getting in the way of what you need or want to do?
Try working through these steps with your counselor!

1. What is the problem?

Take a minute to make sure that this is really **your** problem to tackle.

A.	Is it happening to me?	Yes	No
B.	Is it happening between me and someone else?	Yes	No
C.	Is it happening to someone else?	Yes	No
D.	Is it happening between two or more other people?	Yes	No

(If you circled "yes" to A or B, this is likely a good problem for you to work on. If you circled "yes" to C or D, this may be a problem for someone else to work on. Talk with your counselor.)

2. Set your goal: What do you need or want?

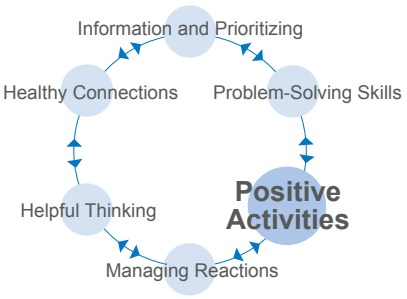
3. **Brainstorm: What are some things you could do to meet your goal?** Try to come up with five to 10 ideas. Remember don't judge yourself—put down all ideas, good or bad!

4. **Choose the best solution: Decide which plan would work best for you.**

Put it into action!

Give it a try. If it doesn't work out, you can try another problem buster.

Appendix C:
Promoting Positive Activities Worksheets and Handouts



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Choosing Positive Activities

What You Should Know

After a disaster, people often stop doing things that used to be enjoyable, rewarding, or personally meaningful. Trying to handle all of the details and tasks—while coping with difficult feelings—quickly drains emotional and physical energy. If you "fill up your tank" by taking care of yourself or doing things that give you meaning, you will not only eventually feel better, but you will have more energy to take care of all those things that must be done. Engaging in hobbies, helping others, re-establishing family routines, and participating in satisfying activities can also improve your mood, make things feel more normal, and restore a sense of control. It may take some time, and it may not feel like fun at first. Don't worry; just keep making meaningful, enjoyable activities a part of your daily life.

Activities to Consider

Indoor Activities	Outdoor Activities	Social Activities	Rebuilding Activities
Reading	Going for a walk	Calling a friend	Fixing up a park or playground
Drawing, painting	Running	Hanging out with friends	Doing something as a tribute to disaster victims
Listening to music	Visiting a park	Contacting a family member	Helping a neighbor with yard work
Watching a movie	Walking a dog	Meeting new people	Helping out at a fundraiser
Writing in a journal	Gardening	Learning a new hobby	Watching a friend's children
Using the computer (games, Internet)	Swimming	Emailing, texting, blogging, chatting online	Helping to repair a community building
Knitting, crocheting	Hiking	Playing team sports, dancing	Running an errand for an elderly person
Making a collage	Biking	Playing a board or card game	Volunteering at a school
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Choose any of the activities on this list that appeal to you, or use the list to help you brainstorm and come up with other activities. Pick at least one activity you can do by yourself, and one social activity that involves someone else.

Positive Activity Worksheet

Doing positive activities can help you improve your mood and make you feel back in control of your life. Use this worksheet to select, make time for, and plan more positive activities.

1. Identify and Plan One or More Activities

Either look over the *Choosing Positive Activities* list or create your own list of two to three activities that you can try. Include some activities that worked in the past to make you feel better. Pick at least one activity you can do by yourself and one social activity that involves someone else.

- _____
- _____
- _____

2. Schedule Activities in a Calendar

Choose a day and a time when you can do one or more of these activities (even for a short while) in the next week. Write them on the calendar below.

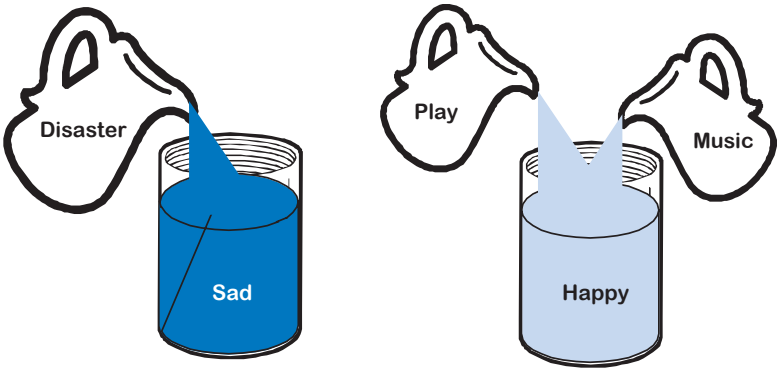
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat

List anything else you need to make sure you can do the activity (bring supplies, make sure my friend is available, check to see if the park is open).

For Children: Choosing Things to Do

What You Should Know

Since the disaster, you may feel like you are filling up with a lot of icky feelings—sadness, fear, and just plain feeling bad. It's not easy to make those bad feelings go away. BUT, we can work on filling up some of your time with activities that will fill you with positive, happy feelings. Since the disaster, you have probably had some chores that you did not want to do. Let's spend a little time choosing a few things that you **do** want to do.



Some Activities to Think About

Here is a list here of some things that many children enjoy doing. Circle a few things on the list that sound like fun. If you (or a grown-up) can think of fun things that are not on the list—maybe something you did before the disaster that made you feel good—add them to the list. Then, pick a few things from this list to try this week. Pick at least one thing that you can do alone and at least one thing that you do with someone else.

Indoor Activities	Outdoor Activities	Activities with Others	Rebuilding Activities
Drawing, painting	Playing with a pet	Telling jokes	Helping make a park or playground usable again
Doing crafts	Running	Talking to a friend	Babysitting brothers or sisters
Singing	Going to the park	Talking to a grown-up	Helping make a play area in your house or yard
Playing an instrument	Going for a walk	Playing a game	Helping at a fundraiser
Listening to music	Shooting baskets	Meeting someone new	Watching a friend's pet
Writing in a journal	Jumping rope	Going to the mall	Helping fix up a school
Playing computer games	Swimming	Emailing, texting, blogging	Helping around the house
Reading	Skating/skateboarding	Playing sports	Doing something to honor disaster victims
Watching a movie	Riding a bike	Spending time with family	Helping with community clean-up activities
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

For Children: Positive Activity Worksheet

When people are feeling really sad, they can feel really tired. Sometimes they feel too tired to do anything—even fun things. Even if you think you won't feel like it, make a plan to do some fun things in the week ahead.

1. Identify and Plan One or More Activities

Look at the activities that you circled on the *Choosing Things to Do* list. Write down two or three of the fun activities that you could do in the next few days. Do you want to play a game with a friend? Do you need a grown-up to take you somewhere? Do you want to do something by yourself? Pick at least one thing that you can do alone and at least one thing that you do with someone else. If you need or want someone to help you do the activity, write down the name.

Activities	Who Will Do This with You
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____

2. Schedule Activities in a Calendar

Take a look at this calendar. Write the names of the activities under the days you can do them.

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat

List anything else you need to make sure you can do the activity (bring supplies, make sure my friend is available, check to see if the park is open).

For Parents: Helping Your Child Plan Activities

It Helps to Understand

When children experience overwhelming events, you might see their behavior change. They might become dramatic and loud (have tantrums, whine, and fight with siblings). Sometimes they become quieter (less active, less playful, or disinterested in things they used to love to do). They may spend more time by themselves. They may talk less or not want to be with you as much. When you ask them questions or ask them to do something, they may say very little or ignore you. When children are withdrawn in this way, try not to become frustrated or angry.

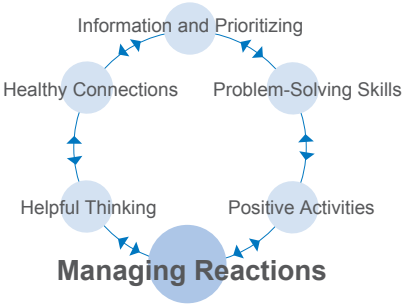
How to Help

- **Be aware of how you're feeling.** If you are upset or angry, try to relax before interacting with children, so you can be calm and supportive.
- **Remind children of the connection between their behavior and their feelings.** Help them understand how their actions are related to the feelings that come when they think about the disaster.
- **Maintain the routines that your family had before the disaster.** Children feel safest when there is order and predictability.

When Children Withdraw

- **Encourage children to do their everyday activities.** Keep to your family routines, eat meals together, attend school and after-school activities, and spend time with friends.
- **Do not let your children spend too much time alone or being passive.** This includes watching TV, hours alone in the bedroom, and over-sleeping.
- **Encourage outdoor activities.** If group activities are not available, taking a walk with your friends or siblings is a good alternative.
- **Ask children to describe activities in school and outside of school.** If your children are unable to report much about their own experiences, ask about their friends' activities.
- **Encourage your children to talk about their negative feelings or thoughts.** Help them to talk with you or other trusted adults about what is making them want to get away and be alone.

Appendix D: Managing Reactions Worksheets and Handouts



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Managing Reactions Worksheet

The combination of triggers, reminders, and chronic stress can create intense physical and emotional reactions that make it hard for you to stay calm. If you learn to manage these distressing reactions, you can reduce their negative effects on decision-making, interpersonal life, daily functioning, sleep, and physical health. You can also reduce the risk of substance abuse or other maladaptive coping responses.

1. Describe the stressful situation and the distressing reaction that is bothering you most.

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Decide what you can do to help feel better. List the skills you can use to help reduce the distressing reaction (breathing, talking with a friend, writing). Review handouts on specific reactions to help make your list.

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Make a plan to address stressful situations and reactions. Identify specific stressful situations that are upsetting, and identify skills to help with each.

Specific Situation	What can I do before, during, or after the stressful situation?

Put it into action!

If it doesn't work out, you can always try another skill.

Breathing Exercise

You may not always notice that your breathing affects how you feel. When you are upset, you may automatically take a deep breath to calm down. When you are anxious, you may breathe in quick, shallow breaths. Very often, when people become frightened or upset, they hold their breath. If they feel as if they need more air, they may hyperventilate. Taking a deep breath or breathing quickly often does not help. In fact, hyperventilation causes anxious feelings. If you feel anxious and want to calm down, you need to slow your breathing and take in *less* air. Rather than taking a deep breath, take a normal breath and exhale slowly. *Exhaling* helps you to relax, not *inhaling*.

Learning to control your breathing takes daily practice. At first, practice when you are not anxious. Later, when you have learned breathing awareness and control, you will find it helpful in stressful situations.

This breathing exercise can help you:

- Increase awareness of your breathing patterns
- Slow down your breathing
- Practice breathing differently on a regular basis to manage tension and fear

Instructions

1. Get comfortable, and take a slow, normal breath in through your nose with your mouth closed, to the count of five. Focus on extending your abdomen while you breathe in slowly.
2. Pause for five seconds.
3. Exhale slowly through your nose or mouth to the count of seven. Say a soothing word to yourself as you breathe out, such as “C-a-a-a-a-a-a-l-m.”
4. Practice this exercise several times a day, taking 10 to 15 breaths at each practice.

Posttraumatic Stress Reactions

What You Should Know

Following disasters, people with posttraumatic stress reactions have four different types of reactions: **re-experiencing, avoidance, numbing,** and **activation**.

Re-experiencing reactions can include:

- Unwanted memories of the disaster that seem to come out of the blue
- A strong memory being triggered by something, like watching a television show about a disaster, a storm coming, a smell of something related, or the anniversary of the disaster
- Nightmares and flashbacks—strong memories that make you feel as if the disaster is happening again
- Intense bodily reactions like a racing heart, sweating, or shaking, or strong emotional reactions

Avoidance reactions can include:

- Not talking about what happened because it upsets you
- Avoiding situations that remind you of the disaster, such as watching the news or going back to the place where the disaster occurred
- Avoiding other places/situations indirectly related to the disaster, such as avoiding crowds because you worry you won't be able to escape

Numbing reactions can include:

- Feeling distant or detached from other people, even people you love
- Losing interest in activities you used to enjoy
- Blocking out painful thoughts or feelings or not remembering parts of what happened (feeling down and withdrawing from others may go along with this reaction)

Activation reactions can include:

- Feeling keyed up and jumpy
- Being irritable
- Being easily startled
- Feeling overly watchful and on edge
- Having trouble sleeping or concentrating

What Can Help

You can learn to gradually manage posttraumatic stress reactions. Healing doesn't mean you'll completely forget the experience or that you won't have emotional pain when remembering, but it may mean having a greater ability to manage distressing emotions and greater confidence in your ability to cope.

Choose from the list below the coping methods you are willing to try:

- **Remind yourself that posttraumatic stress reactions are common.** Know that you're not alone, weak, or "crazy."
- **Practice ways to manage reactions.** Try calming strategies, such as breathing exercises, writing about your feelings and thoughts, meditation, exercise, stretching, yoga, prayer, listening to quiet music, or

spending time outdoors. These activities can improve your mood and reduce your anxiety. Make a plan for coping with stressful situations or triggers that will make you feel more in control of your reactions.

- **Practice helpful thinking.** Check out your thoughts. Are they negative and unhelpful? If so, they may be causing your upset feelings. Develop a plan to substitute helpful thoughts. For example, if you find yourself thinking, "I can't do it," challenge yourself with questions such as:
  - "Is it true that I can't do it?"
  - "Is it ALWAYS true?"
  - "Under what circumstances COULD I do it?"
  - "Could I do it if I had some help?"

  Then you can deliberately substitute a helpful thought. In this case, you might say to yourself, "With the right help, I can get through this."
- **Do fun or meaningful activities.** Distract yourself from your reactions by engaging in hobbies, helping others, re-establishing family routines, and participating in satisfying activities.
- **Spend time with others.** Being with family, friends, or others in your community may help reduce your sense of isolation, rebuild trust in others, and provide an opportunity to contribute to others' well-being.
- **Avoid using alcohol or drugs to cope with your reactions.** Alcohol and other drugs—while they seem to help in the short term—always make things worse in the long term. If you need to, join an alcohol or drug treatment program.
- **Call a counselor for help.** If your reactions continue or increase, contact this program or another program for further assistance.

Anger and Irritability

What You Should Know

After disasters, people can be irritable and angry for many reasons, including not sleeping well, feeling that they are being treated unfairly, having too much to do and not having enough time or resources, and feeling that no one is listening to them. When you are angry, you may express it outwardly, as in rage, or you may bury it inside yourself, feeling irritable or edgy. Either way, anger can cause problems with your health, emotional well-being, and relationships. To deal with these reactions, you need to identify the stressful situations that cause them and learn how to manage them.

What Can Help

- **Learn about your anger and irritability.** Learn to recognize the situations that trigger your anger and the early warning signs that you are angry. Then use the skills listed below to cope with these feelings.
- **Practice methods to manage reactions.** Use calming strategies to reduce your anger. Try breathing exercises; writing down your feelings and thoughts; talking to a friend; exercising, praying or meditating; listening to quiet soothing music; or spending time outdoors. Make a plan for handling situations that trigger your anger. Identify and remove the triggers or plan how you will manage when you encounter them so that you can feel more in control of your reactions.
- **Take a Time Out.** Anger can increase your heart rate so much that you cannot clearly concentrate on the situation you are facing. Taking a break to calm down before entering the situation may help you keep a clearer head during the situation. If you are in a relationship, agree with your partner beforehand on a signal (such as a hand gesture) for taking a break. A time out can keep disagreements from getting out of control. This doesn't mean ignoring your feelings, but instead finding a way to cool down so that you can resume talking and resolve the problem.
- **Do fun or meaningful activities.** Distract yourself from your reactions by engaging in hobbies; helping others; resuming family routines; and doing fun, meaningful, and satisfying activities.
- **Practice helpful thinking.** Check out your thoughts. Are they negative and unhelpful? If so, they may be causing your anger. Develop a plan to substitute helpful thoughts, such as those on the table below. Then—whenever you have unhelpful thoughts—practice switching to helpful thoughts and concentrating on them.

Unhelpful Thoughts	Makes You Feel	Helpful Thoughts	Makes You Feel
"It's unfair."	Angry Vengeful	"This could have happened to anyone." "Sometimes bad things happen to good people."	Realistic Accepting Understanding Reasonable
"It's their fault this happened."	Angry Frustrated Vengeful Accusing Mistrusting	"Blaming people doesn't change my situation." "Others may be to blame, but I need to focus on myself and my family."	Accepting Hopeful

- **Don't use alcohol or drugs to cope with your anger.** Alcohol and other drugs, while they may seem to help in the short term, always make things worse in the long term. If you need to, join an alcohol or drug treatment program.
- **Use conflict resolution principles to resolve conflicts with others:**
  - **Begin with a positive approach.** Try to establish rapport and mutual trust. Try for a small concession early in negotiations.
  - **Have a concrete strategy.** Know what your needs and concerns are, and anticipate how the other will respond. How strong are your position and situation? How important is the issue? How important will it be to stick to your position?
  - **Consider the other person's situation.** Gather information about the other's interests and goals. What are the real needs versus wants? What is his/her strategy?
  - **Address problems, not personalities.** Avoid the tendency to attack the other person personally. If threatened, defending yourself will make resolving the problem more difficult.
  - **Maintain a goal-oriented frame of mind.** If the other person attacks you personally, don't let him/her trap you into an emotional reaction. Let the other person blow off steam without taking it personally. Try to understand the problem behind the anger.
  - **Emphasize win-win solutions.** Even in what appear to be win-lose situations, there are often win-win solutions. Look for a solution that includes each person's needs. Create additional alternatives, such as "low cost" concessions that might have high value to the other person. Look for alternatives that allow the other person to feel her needs have been met.
  - **Use clear criteria.** Negotiate on principles and results, not emotions or pressure. Try to find clear criteria that both sides can use to evaluate alternatives.
- **Call a counselor for help.** If your reactions continue or increase, contact this program or another program for further assistance.

Sleep Difficulties

What You Should Know

Many people have difficulty sleeping after a disaster, such as trouble falling asleep or staying asleep or waking too early. To make it worse, the way that you behave and think can trigger a cycle that continues the sleep problems. The cycle starts with worrying that you're not getting enough sleep and that you won't be able to make it through your day. Once you start worrying, you'll have even more difficulty getting to sleep.

What Can Help

- **Use calming strategies.** Try to calm your body and mind with strategies such as breathing exercises, meditation, stretching, yoga, prayer, or listening to quiet music.
- **Change your behaviors and routines to those that promote regular sleep.**
  For example:
  - Wake up at the same time every day. Don't "sleep in" for more than one hour.
  - Allow a wind-down time prior to sleep. Spend 30 minutes doing something non-stressful and non-stimulating (turn off your television and computer).
  - Have a bedtime routine that can remind your body that it is time to go to bed, such as taking a bath, listening to quiet music, or reading a book.
  - Use your bed only for sleep and sexual activity.
  - Do not stay in bed when you are not asleep. If you cannot fall asleep in about 20 minutes, get up and go to another room until you feel sleepy, then try again.
  - Avoid caffeine. Don't have coffee, tea, cocoa, or cola drinks after 4 p.m.
  - Avoid nicotine and alcohol. Both can interfere with deeper sleep cycles.
  - Avoid sleeping pills.
  - Avoid exercise three hours before going to bed.
- **Practice helpful thinking.** Watch out for unhelpful thoughts that can interfere with sleep, such as, "If I don't get enough sleep, I won't be able to do anything tomorrow" or "Not sleeping is really unhealthy." Replace these thoughts with new ones such as "I'll do okay—I've done fine on little sleep before" and "If I relax and stop thinking this way, I'll be able to get more sleep."
- **Consider talking to a medical or other healthcare practitioner.** He/She may be able to help if using these strategies does not improve your sleep.

Reactions to Chronic Stress

What You Should Know

Disasters often create stress that lasts for weeks and months. Reactions to this stress can include:

- Frustration and worry
- Tension and irritability
- Feelings of sadness and demoralization
- Feeling overwhelmed by major life changes

What Can Help

- **Increase self-care and sleep hygiene.** Make sure to take care of your physical health. Work toward eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, drinking plenty of water, and trying to get enough sleep. Start by changing your habits in one area, then work on another, and so on.
- **Practice relaxation exercises.** Add regular short "mental relaxation" breaks and breathing exercises to your daily life. Find time each day to use these skills.
- **Make use of periods of reduced stress.** Take advantage of times when you have less stress or a lighter workload to reintroduce positive or meaningful activities into your life, including couple/family activities, time with friends, exercise, or hobbies.
- **Organize your thoughts and feelings.** You can write in a journal or write a letter to a family member or friend to help you clarify your thoughts and feelings. You don't have to mail your letter. You might keep it for a while until you decide what to do with it, tear it up, or add it to a journal to remember how you were thinking and feeling during this very difficult time.
- **Gain a broad perspective.** If you are feeling bad about yourself or your life, make a list of your personal strengths and successes, such as being a hardworking and a loving parent, having helped a friend in need, or having gone back to school to learn new skills. Use this list to find positive, helpful "self-statements" to replace any negative self-feelings.
- **Help others.** Take a break from your own problems. Helping other people in need or working in your community can take your mind off your own problems, put them in perspective, and make you feel better about yourself.

Depressed Mood

What You Should Know

After a disaster, while it is common to be sad, you may find your sadness becomes severe or long lasting. You may feel down, depressed, or blue for some time. You may lose interest or pleasure in activities you used to enjoy. You may notice an increase or decrease in appetite, resulting in weight loss or gain. You may have trouble sleeping or sleep too much. Some people report physical agitation or jitteriness, while others report feeling slowed down. You may find that you have trouble concentrating or making decisions. Sometimes people report feeling worthless or guilty. The most severe and dangerous symptom of depression involves thoughts of death or planning suicide. If you have suicidal thoughts—even if you would never act on them—contact your doctor or therapist so that you can develop a safety plan to use in case your thoughts about suicide increase to a dangerous level.

What Can Help

- **Practice calming strategies.** Depressed mood can sometimes be related to anxiety and worry. To reduce the worry and anxiety that contribute to feeling down, practice calming strategies such as breathing, prayer, meditation, yoga.
- **Reach out to others for support, or give support to others.** Spending time with or helping other people can often improve mood or help you replace negative habits and thoughts with more positive ones.
- **Deliberately schedule more positive or meaningful activities in your life.** Choose activities that energize you, distract you from your problems and sad thoughts, give you more positive feelings, or make you feel better about yourself. Plan one or more of these activities a week, even if you don't feel like it.
- **Change your unhelpful thoughts to more helpful ones.** Check out your thoughts. Are they negative and unhelpful? If so, they may be causing your upset feelings. Develop a plan to substitute helpful thoughts. For example, if you find yourself thinking, "I can't stand this," try changing it to something like, "This feeling won't last forever," or "It's okay that I'm still feeling bad; I'm doing everything I can to feel better." Remember that it is common to feel down after a disaster, so try not to judge yourself for feeling that way. Being hard on yourself tends to make you feel worse.
- **Take care of yourself.** A depressed mood can be improved by taking better care of your body. Eat healthy foods, exercise, drink plenty of water, and get enough sleep. Consider doing something nice for yourself that you wouldn't normally do, such as taking time for taking a hot bath, getting a massage, reading a fun book, or going for a walk.

Post-Disaster Fears

What You Should Know

You may have difficulty dealing with the additional stresses caused by the disaster, fear that you won't have the quality of life you once had, or worry that another disaster will occur. Such fears and worries may cause considerable distress and interfere with your daily activities. Exposure to reminders of the disaster, such as aftershocks following an earthquake or winds and rain after a hurricane or tornado, may intensify these post-disaster fears and worries.

What Can Help

- **Practice ways to manage reactions.** Try calming strategies, such as breathing exercises, writing about feelings and thoughts, meditation, exercise, stretching, yoga, prayer, listening to quiet music, or spending time outdoors. These activities can improve your mood and reduce your fear. Make a plan to identify stressful situations or those things that trigger your fear, and ways to handle them before, during, and afterwards.
- **Do fun or meaningful activities.** Distract yourself from your reactions by engaging in hobbies, helping others, re-establishing family routines, and participating in satisfying activities.
- **Spend time with others.** Being with family, friends, or others in your community may help reduce your sense of isolation, get you the practical help you may need to handle your fear, and provide an opportunity to contribute to others' well-being.
- **Practice helpful thinking.** Check out your thoughts. Are they negative and unhelpful? If so, they may be causing your upset feelings. Develop a plan to substitute helpful thoughts. For example, if you find yourself thinking, "I can't handle what's happening now," or "I can't handle what might happen in the future," challenge yourself with questions such as:
  - "Is it true that I can't handle it?"
  - "Is it ALWAYS true?"
  - "Under what circumstances COULD I handle it?"
  - "Could I handle it if I had some help?"

  Choose to deliberately substitute a helpful thought. In this case, you might say to yourself, "With the right help, I can get through this."
- **Use problem-solving.** If your fears are related to post-disaster stresses, use problem-solving to find up-to-date information about the status of the disaster recovery, what resources may be available (i.e., financial, employment, or housing assistance), and how you can get help with your problems.
- **Don't use alcohol or drugs to cope with your fears.** Alcohol and other drugs—while they seem to help in the short term—always make things worse in the long term. If you need to, join an alcohol or drug treatment program.
- **Talk to your doctor about your fears.** Your doctor can take care of your physical health better if he/she knows about your fears. Doctors can prescribe medications that may reduce fearful thoughts, or refer you for more specialized help.
- **Call a counselor for help.** If your fears continue or increase, contact this program or another program for further assistance, or consult with your doctor.
- **Plan ahead.** If you are afraid of future disasters, learn more about the type of disaster that occurred, including the warning signs, and what you can expect to happen afterward. Assemble an emergency preparedness kit for your family, take steps to make your house or school safer, and develop—and practice—a family safety plan. Have your children help, if they are able, with some of the preparations.

Grief Reactions

What You Should Know

If a loved one has died, you may feel as though your entire world has turned upside down. You will need a period of adjustment before you feel better. The amount of time it will take for you to grieve will depend on the circumstances of the death, the nature of the relationship, and your own personal needs. While grief is not the same for everyone, there are a number of similarities among people grieving after a disaster:

- In the beginning, you may spend a lot of time thinking about the person who died, longing and, perhaps, searching for him/her.
- You are likely to experience strong feelings of sadness and loneliness, fear and anxiety, and even resentment and anger. You may avoid thinking about your loss, while at other times you may make special efforts to remember or include the loved one in your life.
- As you start to go on with your life without the friend or family member, you will typically feel the intensity of grief subsiding. You will start to accept the death, take comfort in positive memories, and even feel that you can maintain a sense of connection to the person who died. You may, however, have a return of brief periods of sadness, even as the intense grief subsides.
- As you start to re-engage in activities and relationships, you may experience guilt over doing so, as if you have betrayed the person who died. This guilt is a common part of the grieving process that typically will lessen as you continue to cope with the death.

Some ways of thinking can keep you trapped in grief, particularly when the death is sudden or unexpected. Common signs of this **complicated grief** are:

- Trouble accepting the death
- Inability to trust others
- Numbness and detachment
- Excessive agitation, bitterness, or anger
- Feeling very uneasy about moving on with life
- Feeling that life is empty or meaningless
- Believing the future will be bleak

What Can Help

- **Seek social support.** Talk to someone you trust about your loss. Make a list of a few caring family members, friends, or others to whom you can talk. Start to reach out to them.
- **Seek religious or spiritual help.** You may find that this can help you gain a broader view, have a sense that you and your loved ones are looked after, and feel connected to a greater power.
- **Find a way to honor the deceased.** Writing or creating a ritual can help you feel connected to the person, give his/her life continuing meaning, and allow you to live in a way that honors and reaffirms your relationship, instead of cutting ties, “getting over it,” and moving on with your life.
- **Take care of yourself.** Do relaxation exercises, find good ways to distract yourself, practice good sleep habits, and plan fun or meaningful activities. Try not to feel guilty about taking temporary breaks from thinking about or remembering your loved one. Taking care of yourself will rebuild your strength and allow you to continue to remember and honor him/her.

- **Practice helpful thinking.** Even though you do not have control over the death, changing your thoughts about it can help you feel better. Use the table below for ideas of helpful thoughts you can focus on, then practice concentrating on them whenever unhelpful thoughts arise.

Unhelpful Thoughts	Makes You Feel	Helpful Thoughts	Makes You Feel
"I should have been able to save her. It's my fault." "Why did I survive, while he didn't?"	Guilty	"If I had done things differently, it might not have made a difference." "That choice belongs to a higher power."	Realistic Accepting Understanding
"There's no one who can help me bear my pain. It will never stop." "My pain will never end. There is nothing I can do to stop it." "I will lose people that I get close to."	Hopeless Powerless Fearful	"If I talk to someone about my grief, it might help me feel better." "I can get help. Some people will understand." "The odds of my losing all the people I get close to are pretty slim. I still have people in my life just like before."	Accepting Hopeful

- **Seek additional counseling.** Counseling can give you the ongoing support and guidance to learn to correct unhelpful thoughts and beliefs, find positive coping strategies, and gain meaning from and a wider view of the death. Counseling can help you find ways to honor and maintain positive memories of the deceased, work towards accepting the death, manage emotions like anger or avoidance, resume normal day-to-day life, and look forward to a better future.

Supporting Someone After a Disaster

What You Should Know

Being a good friend to someone who has had exposure to a disaster or the death of a loved one involves empathy, patience, persistence, and a willingness to listen and be available whenever the friend/loved one needs it. He/she may need to talk or be supported immediately, and then not want to talk at all for months or years. Try to watch, listen, and follow his/her lead as to when and where you can provide the kind of support that will be most calming. Traumatic stress and loss—as opposed to regular stress—can affect a person for years or even decades. When a person has a reaction to a reminder, no matter how long after the event, he/she needs patience and empathy. It is like the difference between having a strained muscle that responds well to stretching and exercising ("getting back on the horse") versus a torn cartilage that needs some support and bracing for a period of time before it can be stretched (empathy, understanding, time to heal).

What Can Help

- **Educate yourself.** Advice we might give in response to common stresses may not be helpful in these situations. For instance, some of the unhelpful things we might say are telling them to "move on," "get back on the horse that threw you," or "get on with life." We might try to get him/her to "cheer up." Using this strategy can make a person who has experienced a disaster or a death feel ashamed or think that he/she is still negatively impacted or that you don't understand the depth of the tragedy.
- **Be patient.** Be tolerant of stress reactions and strong emotions and remain empathic as time passes.
- **Be understanding.** If your friend/loved one wants to talk, listen carefully, and support, comfort, and accept him/her; try to understand as best you can, reflect back what you have heard, and empathize (try to appreciate how difficult this must be, how hard it must have been).
- **Ask questions.** If you don't know what to say or do in response to his/her talking with you, you can share that you are not sure how you can be helpful, but you want to be. Ask what he/she needs right now. Tailor your support to the needs, capacities, and desires of your friend/loved one.
- **Be realistic.** If you find that you are not the best person to be a support for any reason, direct him/her to the social support that seems most helpful.
- **Be persistent.** Find ways to reach out and connect to him/her, even though he/she may be withdrawing from contact with others.
- **Help with practical needs.** Use creative problem-solving and help with his/her practical needs.
- **Understand the impact of triggers.** Understand that there are many reminders that can trigger reactions in your friend/loved one, even long after the disaster. If your friend/loved one reacts to a reminder, be supportive, understanding, and let him/her know that there is no "time limit" on reactions, and no time limit on your willingness to support him/her.
- **Honor the deceased.** If your friend/loved one is grieving the death of a loved one, encourage positive memories of the deceased, and honor the meaning and significance of the relationship. You may also participate in cultural rituals or traditions.
- **Encourage self-care.** Encourage your friend/loved one to take time outs from grief for self-care activities, such as relaxation, exercise, and improving sleep habits.
- **Support getting help.** Encourage a consultation with a doctor or counselor if your friend/loved one is still having significant distress or difficulty with daily life functioning after several months.
- **Take care of yourself.** Find ways to take care of yourself if your loved one/friend's reactions take a toll on you.

Drug and Alcohol Problems

What You Should Know

After a disaster, some people increase their use of alcohol or other substances. While there is nothing wrong with responsible drinking, increased use of alcohol or drugs could lead to problems. Some use substances to avoid thinking about what happened or to dull feelings of anxiety, sadness, guilt, or anger. While using drugs and alcohol can help you escape in the short run, they can make things worse in the long run. For those who use alcohol or drugs for sleep problems, these substances may seem to help; however, they can interfere with the body's ability to sleep naturally and create more sleep problems. For many reasons, people turn to alcohol or substances to try to reduce negative reactions, but the long-term effect is most often negative.

What Can Help

- **Pay close attention to any change in your use of alcohol and/or drugs.** Write down the amount and frequency of your usage to determine the extent of any problem.
- **Use all prescription and over-the-counter medications as indicated.** Ask your doctor about the medications you are using, their effects, and how they interact.
- **Take care of yourself.** By eating healthy foods, exercising, drinking plenty of water, and getting enough sleep, you will gain strength to refrain from unhealthy habits.
- **Practice ways to manage reactions.** If anxiety is a trigger for drinking or taking drugs, try slow breathing, writing down feelings and thoughts, meditation, exercise, yoga, prayer, quiet music, or spending time outdoors. These calming strategies can improve your mood and reduce your anxiety. Make a plan for handling stressful situations that trigger your use of alcohol/substances.
- **Practice helpful thinking.** Check out your thoughts. If negative and unhelpful, they may cause feelings that lead to drinking or using drugs. Plan how you can substitute helpful thoughts. For example, if you think, "I can't calm down without alcohol," try replacing it with "This feeling won't last forever," or "I can do this one day at a time."
- **Spend time with supportive others.** Spending time with friends and family who support your recovery can help you feel better, take your mind off cravings, remind you that you want to be healthy, and provide positive activities that don't involve alcohol or drugs.
- **Make use of community resources.** There are resources for alcohol and drug problems in most communities, many of them free, such as AA or Rational Recovery.
- **Talk with a doctor or counselor.** If you believe that you have a serious problem with substances, talk to a counselor or doctor about it. If appropriate, he/she may be able to help you find substance abuse treatment.

For Children: Getting Control of Your Fears

What You Should Know

When you go through a very scary event, you may feel afraid for days or weeks or even longer afterwards. You may have a hard time understanding that your upset feelings come from the really upsetting experience that you went through. It seems weird that what you're feeling right now could be because of the frightening event you went through days or weeks or months ago. But it can be, and it's pretty common.

What Can Help

- **Keep doing your everyday activities.** Eat meals with your family, go to school and after-school activities, and spend time with your friends, even if it is hard right now.
- **Try to spend more time with your parents, other adults, or friends.** Choose those who have helped you or made you feel better. Figure out when and how to reach out to them.
- **Tell your parents, or an adult you trust, that you are feeling afraid or worried.** Together you may figure out why you are feeling that way and how to manage those feelings.
- **Remember that people often feel afraid.** After a scary event, many people still feel afraid even when the danger is over.
- **Take a few slow, relaxing breaths.** To help your body calm down and stop panicking, practice slow breathing this way:

  1. Put your hand on your stomach when you breathe in and notice how it sticks out like a balloon filling up with air. Breathe in slowly as you count to three: one . . . two . . . three. Think about your favorite color and all the good things that are that color.
  2. When you breathe out, feel your stomach shrinking back in, like when a balloon loses air. Breathe out slowly as you count to five: one . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five. Think about the color gray and all the upsetting feelings leaving your body.
  3. Do this a few more times. You can also practice breathing slowly by blowing bubbles.

For Parents: Helping Children Control Their Fears

What You Should Know

After children go through a very scary event, they may feel afraid for days or weeks or even longer. They often have a hard time connecting their upset feelings to the really upsetting experiences that they had previously. This is perfectly understandable and expectable. When they are upset, you can remind your children of the link between what they are feeling now and the scary event they went through. Here are a few more tips to help your children handle their fears.

What Can Help

- **Encourage children to do their everyday activities.** Keep to your family routines, eat meals together, go to school and after-school activities, and spend time with friends.
- **Spend extra time with your children.** Doing things you did before the disaster will help comfort them now. Read them stories, play games with them, or go for walks.
- **Encourage your children to tell you—or an adult they know well and trust—when they are feeling afraid or worried.** Tell your children that you can help them figure out why they are feeling that way and how to make them to feel better.
- **Remind children that sometimes people feel afraid.** After a scary event, many people feel afraid even when they are no longer in danger.
- **Remind children that they are safe now.** Tell the child what you or the community are doing to keep them safe. If the danger is not over yet (aftershocks, debris in the streets, power lines down), tell your child what to do to keep safe.
- **Teach your children to take a few slow, relaxing breaths.** This helps their bodies to calm down and stop panicking. Walk them through the following steps:

  1. "Put your hand on your stomach when you breathe in and notice how it sticks out like a balloon filling up with air. Breathe in slowly as you count to three: one . . . two . . . three. Think about your favorite color and all the good things that are that color."
  2. "When you breathe out, your stomach should shrink back in, like when a balloon loses air. Breathe out slowly as you count to five: one . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five. Think about the color gray and all the upsetting feelings leaving your body."
  3. "Great! Now do this a few more times."

  Make this practice fun by having your children blow bubbles or act out a story in which the main character uses slow breathing. Kids also like being the expert; after they master this skill, they can teach it to another family member.

For Parents: Help for Children's Sleep Problems

What You Should Know

When children have experienced something very upsetting, often their sleep habits change. They may resist going to bed and falling asleep to avoid scary thoughts and dreams. They may wake up with nightmares and have trouble getting back to sleep. When kids don't sleep, their parents don't get to sleep either. It is frustrating for parents when their kids can't explain what they are thinking and feeling. When kids act up at bedtime, they may be showing their parents that they are worried and scared.

What Can Help

When your children come to you at night, upset and unable to be alone, you can best help them by doing the following:

- **Take a few seconds to calm yourself.** When your children have sleep problems, you may feel sad, powerless, or annoyed. By staying calm (or at least pretending to!), you help your child to calm. Don't add to the drama. Be warm, yet matter-of-fact.
- **Soothe your child.** Depending on your children's needs, you can hold them, rub their backs, quietly sit with them, or guide them to take slow breaths.
- **Take your child back to his/her room.** Say that you will stay until he/she feels a little better. Don't turn on all the lights, but allow some light to come into the room.
- **Encourage your child to talk about his/her fearful thoughts.** Help him/her find words for the disturbing thoughts ("I know you are having trouble sleeping. Are you feeling worried or afraid? What is worrying/scaring you?") Help your child figure out the difference between what felt unsafe and scary then and now. Point out how and why specific dangers no longer exist.
- **Sit with your child by his/her bed.** Through your words and your touch, remind your child of your presence and your ability to keep him/her safe.
- **Quietly say that you are going back to your bed.** When your child has relaxed for a few minutes, say goodnight and reassure him/her that you are close by and that he/she is safe.
- **Calmly tell your child that you will check back in a few minutes (and do so).** If your child protests and seems distressed, say that you must go to bed soon, but you can sit a few more moments.

Other Helpful Sleep Tips

- Encouraging a young child to sleep with a familiar cuddly toy (even one he/she no longer sleeps with) may help your child start to feel safe and secure again. Don't worry that this is "moving backward." Once he/she is more comfortable, the toy will be cast aside.
- Staying calm is the best way to show your child that, while you understand why he/she feels upset, you know that there is no danger and that you are confident the family is safe.
- Your child's sleep problems and need for additional help may go on for several days. The more that you can keep to regular bedtimes and rituals, the better.
- You play an important role when your child learns from you that he/she can recover from fear. You are helping him/her regain the mastery of going to sleep that was interrupted by the scary events.

For Parents: Children's Intrusive (Unwanted) Thoughts & Traumatic Reminders

What You Should Know

Often when children have experienced overwhelming upsetting events, they have a hard time not thinking about them. When they try their best not to think about the disaster, upsetting memories may still pop into their minds. Children may feel as if the event is happening all over again. Re-experiencing awful feelings, thoughts, or memories is even worse when they seem to occur out of nowhere. When children feel they have no control over their thoughts and feelings, they may feel the same helplessness that they felt during the disaster itself. Sometimes they might not even be aware of the things that trigger the frightening memories. Teaching your child about those triggers and reminders is the first step to help him/her take back control of those thoughts and feelings.

What Can Help

- **Be aware of how you're feeling.** If you are upset, angry or distressed, take time to calm yourself before you respond to your child. As long as you are annoyed or irritable, you won't be able to soothe or support him/her.
- **Remind children of the connection between their behavior and feelings.** The best time to make the connection is when they are not distressed or acting out. Pick a quiet time, but not bedtime, to suggest that perhaps an outburst that happened earlier in the day was due to remembering the event.
- **Maintain routines that your family had before the disaster.** Children feel safest when there is order and predictability.
- **Identify triggers/reminders.** If your child seems to get stirred up or especially nervous at particular times, try to help him/her think about what he/she did, saw, smelled, or felt before the feeling started. Here are some questions to help identify triggers and reminders:
  - Was there a thought or memory that entered your head just then?
  - Did anything remind you of the event?
  - Do the images or feelings seem to come at specific times of the day?
  - Do the memories pop up around particular people or places?
  - Do you notice any smells, sights, or sounds around the time that memories come up?
  - Do the memories seem to pop-up when you are talking about certain things, hearing others talking about certain things, hearing certain stories, watching certain types of TV shows or movies?

  Once you've identified the triggers/reminders, help your child identify some things he/she can do when being triggered, such as talking with you, drawing or writing in a journal, or doing something fun to take his/her mind off the upsetting reminder.
- **Help your child replace the intrusive or unwanted thought or memory with a positive, more pleasant thought or memory.** The positive memory can be anything: a special moment like scoring a goal, getting a good mark on an exam or project, or taking a ride at an amusement park. It doesn't matter what the memory is, as long as it works.
- **Help him/her practice a controlled, relaxing breathing exercise.** If at the time of an intrusive thought or memory, your child becomes anxious, try saying:
  1. "Put your hand on your stomach when you breathe in and notice how it sticks out like a balloon filling up with air. Breathe in slowly as you count to three: one . . . two . . . three. Think about your favorite color and all the good things that are that color."

2. "When you breathe out, feel your stomach shrinking back in, like when a balloon loses air. Breathe out slowly as you count to five: one . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five. Think about the color gray and all the upsetting feelings leaving your body."
3. "Great! Now do this a few more times."

When You Know Something Is Wrong, but Your Child Can't Tell You

At times, you may know that your child is having intrusive, unwanted thoughts or memories about the event, and that he/she is unable or too scared to discuss them with you. He/she may seem withdrawn, spaced out, or quietly agitated. If this occurs, try these suggestions:

1. **Engage in a soothing or enjoyable activity with your child.** Doing something calming or fun with you can help reorient your child to the present moment and take his/her mind off of what is bothering him/her.
2. **Offer your child a shoulder or back rub.** Touch can help reorient a child to what is happening in the here and now.
3. **Offer a cold or hot drink** (whichever he/she usually prefers). The taste and smell can help remind your child that he/she is safe and the disaster is not actually occurring.
4. **If there is an aroma that your child likes, try to have him/her smell it** (something cooking, incense, laundry detergent, bathroom product). Aromas also can help reorient children.
5. **Do the controlled, relaxing breathing exercise** described above.
6. **Discuss possible triggers** as described above.

For Parents: Children's Anxiety (Avoiding, Clinging, Fears)

What You Should Know

When children are frightened, they need to take back control of their feelings. They may not understand that their present fear is connected to the disaster. Remind them that they didn't have strong scary feelings before the event and that the feelings will not be strong forever. Also, point out that the event is over and the danger of the event is no longer present. Helping your child understand the connection between the scary feelings they are having and the anxious ways they are behaving can lead them to taking control of themselves.

What Can Help

- **Maintain daily routines.** Don't agree to avoid places and activities that are part of your child's daily life. This will not help your child overcome anxiety.
- **Talk with your child's teachers when he/she resists going to school.** Ask teachers to be sympathetic—but firm—as you drop off the child in the morning.
- **Engage children in confidence-promoting activities.** Remind your child of his/her competence and capabilities by assigning special tasks at home.
- **Watch for new areas of anxiety or anxious behavior.** Help your children talk about the worry that drives the behavior and discuss ways to help him/her feel better.
- **Give children a reality check.** Remind them that their present situation is safe (e.g., mom and dad will be safe when the child doesn't see them; the rooms of the house are safe).
- **Remind children of the connection between their behaviors and feelings.** Then talk about the feelings during the disaster and the new worries that have developed since the event.

When Children Are Extremely Nervous or Panicky

- **Help them calm.** If they are young or wish to be held, hold them. If they are sobbing and breathless, tell them to breathe slowly with you.
- **Practice slow, relaxed breathing:**
  - "Put your hand on your stomach when you breathe in and notice how it sticks out like a balloon filling up with air. Breathe in slowly as you count to three: one . . . two . . . three. Think about your favorite color and all the good things that are that color."
  - "When you breathe out, feel your stomach shrinking back in, like when a balloon loses air. Breathe out slowly as you count to five: one . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five. Think about the color gray and all the upsetting feelings leaving your body."
  - "Great! Now do this a few more times."

For Parents: Children's Tantrums and Acting-Out Behavior

What You Should Know

Engaging parents in power struggles is a normal part of every child's development. While toddlers are famous for their full-scale tantrums, the arguments and oppositional behaviors of school-age kids and teenagers are no less dramatic. Sometimes these behaviors are hard to deal with. When kids are struggling to push away, parents feel that their authority is being challenged. Many children push away when they feel insecure about their ability to take care of themselves. They may protest loudest when their need for parents' help and authority is greatest.

When children have experienced a disaster, often they feel that they have lost control of their world and of themselves. They are overwhelmed with fear and may go to great lengths to regain power and control. Opposing and struggling with parents, teachers, and friends can be the easiest way to fight feeling small and helpless; after a disaster, their tantrums and acting out often increase in frequency and intensity. However, when children succeed in drawing adults into battles, they will not only continue to feel small, but they will also risk losing the very support that they need. They may become more afraid as they get into fights that they can't win. Our job is to help kids put the brakes on these unproductive battles and find effective ways to deal with the frightened, helpless feelings that were born out of the disaster.

What Can Help

- **Be aware of how you're feeling.** If you are upset, angry, or distressed, take time to calm yourself before you respond to your child. As long as you are annoyed or irritable, you won't be able to soothe or support him/her.
- **Remind children of the connection between their behavior and feelings.** Then talk about the feelings during the disaster and the new worries and feelings that have come up since the event.
- **Maintain the routines that your family had before the disaster.** Children feel safest when there is order and predictability.
- **Tell children that they are starting a fight that you don't want to have.** Say as calmly as you can, "What you are doing is making me mad. You may want to fight, but I don't, because it doesn't help you and it won't help you feel better."
- **If children continue to try to engage you in the fight, offer three choices.** Say, "You can either (1) do what I have asked, (2) talk about what is upsetting you, or (3) go to your room and calm yourself down, but you can't take this out on me." Once calm, he/she may be ready to work things out.
- **The fight has to stop first.** The middle of a fight or tantrum is not the time to try to have a discussion. Give your child the space he/she needs to self-soothe before trying to resolve things.
- **In a calm moment, introduce these ideas:**
  - **You've noticed changes in behavior.** Say, "Since the event, you have been getting into a lot of fights about things that usually aren't a big deal. Can you tell me how you've been feeling since it happened?"
  - **Fighting doesn't help.** Say, "Fighting with me isn't helping you feel better. It makes both of us mad, and, when you can't stop yourself and I have to punish you, it can't feel good."
  - **I'm in charge.** Say, "Even when you are struggling with your feelings about the event, my job is to help you to stop [the behavior]. If you want to talk about your feelings, I'm willing to listen, but whether you want to or not, your behavior is unacceptable."
  - **There will be consequences.** Say, "If you continue [the behavior], then we will find ways of reminding you of your responsibilities; you will have restrictions." Choose a consequence that is short term, that

you can enforce without a struggle, and that your child cares about. Always try to give a warning, which gives your child a chance to control him/herself.

- **When children recognize the connection between the fighting and the feelings resulting from the disaster, they will fight less.** When the next struggle begins, interrupt it by announcing, "What we've been talking about is happening again . . . " If your child can talk with you, that may settle things down. If not, you may have to give a warning of a consequence. Then turn or walk away, to give your child a few minutes to try to get back in control.
- **Talk with a doctor or counselor.** If you believe that the tantrums or other acting out behavior are getting worse, more extensive treatment may be needed. Ask for a referral to a behavior specialist who has experience in treating children after disasters.

For Parents: Children and Grief: Information for Families

What You Should Know

Like adults, children and teens may feel intense sadness and loss when a person close to them dies. And, like adults, children and teens express their grief—both emotionally and physically—in their actions, their words, and their thoughts. Each child and parent grieves differently, and there is no right or wrong way or length of time to grieve.

Children may show their grief in these ways:

- Sleeping or crying more than usual
- Regressing—returning to earlier behaviors (sucking thumbs, baby talk, wetting the bed)
- Developing new fears or problems in school
- Complaining about aches and pains
- Becoming angry and irritable
- Withdrawing and isolating themselves from family and friends

Grieving children may behave in ways that don't seem connected to sadness or grief. A usually quiet toddler may have more tantrums, or an active child may lose interest in things he/she used to do. A studious teen may engage in risky behavior. Whatever a child's age, he/she may feel guilty about having caused the death (even when he/she did not). Sometimes grieving children take on the role of an adult, worrying about their surviving parent. They may wonder about who will care for them if they lose that parent as well.

Children having normal grief reactions will do things that help them adapt to the death and to life without that person. Young children may act out the story of the event in their play. Older children and teens may create rituals to mourn or honor the person. Typically the normal grief process helps children to:

- Accept the reality and permanence of the death
- Experience and cope with painful reactions to the death, such as sadness, anger, resentment, confusion, and guilt
- Adjust to changes in their lives and their role in the family that result from the death
- Develop new relationships or deepen existing relationships as a way to cope with the difficulties and loneliness resulting from the loss
- Find new life-affirming activities as a way to move forward
- Maintain a continuing, appropriate attachment to the person who died through such activities as reminiscing, remembering, and memorializing
- Make meaning of the death, perhaps coming to an understanding of why the person died
- Continue through the normal developmental stages of childhood and adolescence

When children have lost a loved one suddenly, they may experience "traumatic grief," where the shock of the death creates trauma symptoms that interfere with the child's ability to work through the typical grieving process. Even happy thoughts of the deceased person remind children of the traumatic way he/she died. Other features of traumatic grief include:

- Intruding memories about the death—nightmares, feeling guilty, self-blame, or thoughts about the horrible way the person died.

- Signs of avoiding and numbing—pulling away, acting as if not upset, and avoiding reminders of the person, the way he/she died, or the event that led to the death.
- Physical or emotional symptoms of increased arousal (being "stirred up")—irritability, anger, trouble sleeping, poor concentration, drop in grades, stomachaches, headaches, increased vigilance (watchfulness), and fears about their own safety or that of others.

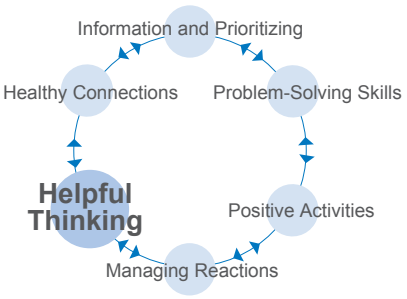
What Can Help

- **Provide a sense of security.** Whenever you have to go somewhere, tell children what time you will return, and do come back at that time. Keep to your family routines and activities. Keep calm by remembering that your child's misbehavior may be related to grief.
- **Be patient.** Children's behavior and needs may be more challenging, especially when you are grieving yourself. Remember to look for and praise good behavior and give extra hugs.
- **Pay attention to words and behaviors.** Listen to what your children say to you. Because some children can't talk about what they are going through, watch for changes in behavior and listen for physical complaints.
- **Encourage expression of feeling.** Suggest drawing, writing, playing, acting, and talking. Describe to children the thoughts and feelings that they are showing by their behavior, so they can learn the words. Don't be afraid of sad or angry feelings, but do set limits on unsafe behaviors.
- **Know that grief reactions may interact with other feelings and behaviors.** Each child has his/her own way of grieving. It might not be clear whether a behavior is about his/her grief or something else. If reactions or behavior become more intense or continue over time, seek additional help.

Take Care of Yourself

- **Get enough sleep, exercise, and time for yourself.** You must take care of yourself in order to take care of your children. It reassures children that you plan to stay healthy. When you model self-care, you help them learn to take good care of themselves, too.
- **Keep caring, familiar, and important adults around.** Grandparents, relatives, special friends, and neighbors can support you and provide caring stability and the "fun" and attention that your children may be craving.
- **Model healthy coping.** Children often take their cues about how to react from the adults they see. If you are sad or upset in front of your children, that's okay. Explain briefly that grownups feel sad, too. Then show children through your words and actions that, even when you're upset, you are able to manage your feelings and take care of them.
- **Seek counseling.** Parents and caregivers sometimes feel as though they should handle everything on their own. Experiencing the death of a loved one is extraordinarily painful—even overwhelming—and doesn't necessarily get better on its own. Seek the advice, guidance, and support of people who know about grief and can answer your questions about what you going through, so you can support your children in what they are going through.

Appendix E: Helpful Thinking Worksheets and Handouts



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Helpful Thinking Handout

After a disaster you might develop extreme, all black or white ways of seeing yourself and the world, such as seeing yourself as "completely" unable to handle your situation, or seeing the world as "totally" unsafe. While understandable, these habits can make your situation even more difficult to deal with by making you feel overwhelmed or hopeless. People rarely take the time to examine what they are thinking, so unhelpful thoughts just keep happening more or less automatically.

You may find it helpful to become more aware of these unhelpful thoughts and consider whether there are more **helpful** thoughts to focus on to make it easier to deal with your situation. While your thoughts may be fairly accurate (for example, another flood is likely to occur sometime in the future), the unspoken assumption that you will not be able to handle the next flood is the unhelpful part of the thought. Below are categories of unhelpful thoughts that are common after a disaster, and how these thoughts may make you feel, as well as more helpful thoughts with which to replace them. Once you identify some of the thoughts, **the key to helpful thinking is to practice helpful thoughts often** during your daily life.

Common Unhelpful Thoughts	Resulting Emotion	Alternate Helpful Thoughts	New Emotional Response
Coping			
"I should be coping better."	Helpless Incompetent Fearful	"The fact I got here today proves I am coping a bit." "Talking to a counselor helps me to cope better." "Most people would have trouble after an event like this."	Less fearful More hopeful Less helpless Stronger Competent Open to seeking support/help
"My reactions mean I am going crazy." "Something must be really wrong with me."	Fearful Worthless Pessimistic	"These reactions are only temporary." "Most people have these reactions after a disaster."	Reassured Capable Hopeful
"Other people are dealing with this better than I am, so what's wrong with me?" "Only weak people react the way I do."	Worthless	"Most people react this way for a while." "My reaction reflects how big this event was, not how weak I am."	Reassured Capable Stronger

Common Unhelpful Thoughts	Resulting Emotion	Alternate Helpful Thoughts	New Emotional Response
Helplessness & Control			
"Things will never be the same again."	Sad Regretful Hopeless	"Feeling really bad usually doesn't last forever." "Thinking like this makes it difficult to plan for the future." "Not everything will be as before. But some things are the same now."	Open to the future Hopeful Accepting
"I have no control over anything."	Helpless Not caring, giving up Confused Frustrated	"I can control some decisions about my future." "Doing things gives me a greater sense of control." "Talking to a counselor shows I have some control."	Purposeful Hopeful, competent Open to setting goals, taking steps Less helpless
Safety			
"The world is a dangerous place."	Fearful Worried Distrustful	"The world can offer good possibilities." "The world is not always dangerous." "There are good people as well as bad in the world." "Most of the time I am safe."	Hopeful Open to a better future Trusting that people will help Calmer
"I can't trust anyone."	Lonely Withdrawn Suspicious Sad	"Trusting people has led to me getting help." "I don't need to be mistrustful of everyone." "I can choose some people to trust."	More trusting, less suspicious Hopeful Optimistic
"I'm not safe."	Worried Fearful Insecure	"*Feeling* unsafe isn't the same as *being* unsafe." "This bad thing has happened, but it doesn't mean it will happen again."	More relaxed Confident, competent More secure

Common Unhelpful Thoughts	Resulting Emotion	Alternate Helpful Thoughts	New Emotional Response
Guilt			
"I am a bad person for letting this happen."	Guilty Worthless Self-loathing	"A bad person would not be feeling guilty about this." "It is because I care so much that I feel bad that it happened to people I love."	Blameless Worthy Self-accepting
"I should have prevented this."	Guilty Worthless, blaming Frustrated Upset	"Nobody could have prevented this." "I can't always protect others/ family."	Self-accepting Worthy, blameless
"I should have done more."	Guilty Frustrated Upset	"At the time I did the best I could." "I wouldn't expect anyone else to have done more than I did."	Able to move on Reduced distress Self-accepting
Blame & Anger			
"It is unfair."	Angry Vengeful	"This could have happened to anyone." "Sometimes bad things happen to good people."	Understanding Realistic Accepting
"It's their fault this happened."	Angry Frustrated Vengeful Blaming Mistrustful	"Blaming people doesn't change my situation." "Others may be to blame, but I need to focus energy on myself and family."	Accepting Optimistic More trusting More able to move on

For Children: Helpful Thinking Handout

Learning to identify the hurtful thoughts that create negative feelings is an important skill. It's very difficult to detect hurtful thoughts because they occur almost automatically, like breathing. However, if you pay attention to your breath, you can control it. It is the same with thinking; if you become aware of what you are thinking and how it makes you feel, you can understand your thoughts and develop the ability to control them.

This handout lists common categories of unhelpful thoughts that can occur after a disaster, and how these thoughts may make you feel, as well as more helpful thoughts to replace them. Once you identify some of the thoughts, the key to helpful thinking is to practice the helpful thoughts often.

Common Unhelpful Thoughts	Resulting Emotion	Alternate Helpful Thoughts	New Emotional Response
"Things will always be like this." "Things will never get better." "My future is hopeless."	Hopeless Sad Scared	"I see what others are doing to improve the community." "It may take a while, but my community will rebuild." "With some changes, I can still achieve my goals."	Hopeful that things can get better Happier Stronger
"I have no one to turn to if I need help." "I can't do anything to help my family." "I can't handle this anymore."	Scared Lonely Frustrated	"I have my parents, my teachers, and my friends who can help me." "I can do chores or pick up my toys, to help my family." "I know that seems hard right now but it will get better."	Stronger Happier Calmer Hopeful that things can get better
"If I shared how I feel with others, they wouldn't care." "My new school does not want me." "I'll never fit in with these kids."	Unloved Lonely Sad Frustrated	"My parents are willing to listen and be a support." "I will get used to my new school." "I will make new friends who share my same interests."	Loved Happier Hopeful that things can get better
"Bad things always happen to me." "The world is a dangerous place." "I'm not safe."	Sad Scared Hopeless	"Good things happen to me, too." "The world is not always dangerous." "Feeling unsafe isn't the same as being unsafe."	Happier Stronger Hopeful that things can get better

Helpful Thinking Worksheet

How we think about ourselves and the things that have happened to us shape how we feel and behave. Although you cannot change what has happened, you can change your thoughts in ways that help you feel more hopeful and less overwhelmed. By focusing on helpful thoughts rather than upsetting ones, you can improve your mood and cope more effectively.

1. Identify Unhelpful Thoughts

Write a brief description of the **situation** you are in when the unhelpful thoughts come up.

Thoughts:

Feelings:

2. Identify Helpful Thoughts

Ask yourself, "What would be more helpful thoughts?"

New Thoughts:

New Feelings:

3. Practice the Helpful Thoughts

Decide how you will practice focusing on new, helpful thoughts. For example, try imagining the situation you described above, and practice saying the helpful thoughts out loud. Set aside some time daily to practice focusing on helpful thoughts.

For Children: Helpful Thinking/Good Coach, Bad Coach Worksheet

The way we think about things changes **the way we feel** about things. The thoughts in your head are like having your own personal coach. A bad coach says unhelpful things that make players feel and play worse. A good coach helps players feel and do better by saying hopeful things.

1. Bad Coach = Unhelpful Thoughts

You've had something really bad happen to you. What are some of those unhelpful thoughts you are having about what happened? Write down the thoughts that sound like a bad coach.

Circle the way(s) you feel when you have unhelpful thoughts.

Scared Sad Mad Helpless Lonely Hopeless

Other:

2. Good Coach = Helpful Thoughts

Let's change things and imagine that you had a good coach saying helpful things to you. What kinds of helpful thoughts would a good coach say?

Circle the way(s) you feel when you have helpful thoughts.

Brave Happy Safe Strong Not So Alone Hopeful

Other:

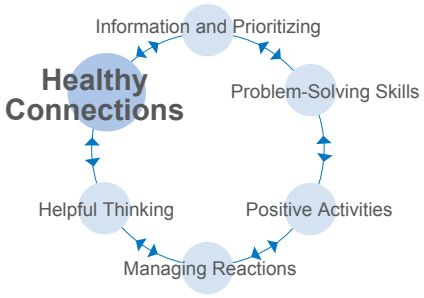
3. Practice with the Good Coach

Now is the time to **fire the bad coach** and **hire the good coach**! Focus on listening only to the good coach. Just like playing a sport, **it takes practice** to get used to thinking helpful thoughts. It's not as easy as it sounds. List some times when you can practice using helpful thoughts.

Payoff Matrix Worksheet

	Keep the Thought	Change the Thought
Advantages (Pros)	In what ways does **holding on** to your thought make your life seem more manageable, safer, or easier to handle? Does the thought provide you with a sense of control, security, or predictability?	How could **changing** your thought improve your life? Consider whether changing your thought would reduce negative feelings and free you up from concerns about past events.
Disadvantages (Cons)	In what ways does **holding on** to your thought make your life more difficult? Consider the effects of the thought on negative feelings that prevent you from doing things you would like to do.	What are the possible disadvantages or costs of **changing** your thought? Would changing the thought lead to your feeling less control, security, or predictability?

Appendix F:
Building Healthy Social Connections Worksheets and Handouts



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Social Connections List

Who is available to you right now?

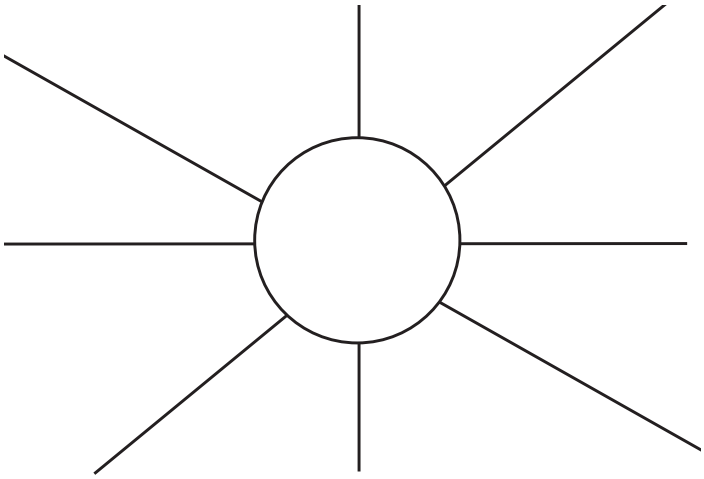
People	Available?
Mother and/or Father	□
Other Primary Caregivers	□
Husband/Wife/Partner	□
Significant Others/Closest Loved Ones	□
Siblings	□
Children	□
Other Family Members	□
Co-workers	□
Religious Professionals	□
Therapist/Healer	□
Primary Care Medical Physician	□
Teachers/Mentors	□
Coaches	□
Friends/Roommates	□
Reliable Support	□
Pets	□
Member of community/social/recreational groups	□
Community agencies and individual providers (e.g., YMCA, social services, Meals-on-Wheels, Hospice)	□

Social Connections Worksheet

Having healthy connections with family, friends, and others is very helpful for people recovering after a disaster. Yet people often have upsetting emotional and physical reactions that may affect their relationships with family members, friends, and others close to them. The disaster may have physically separated you from one another, making it hard to communicate and creating lots of problems that take up your time and energy You can take simple, concrete steps to rebuild your social connections and reach out to the people in your life whom you may not have thought of as supports.

1. Develop a Social Connections Map

Write your name in the center of the circle, and then write in the names of people, pets, professionals, or organizations that are part of your social network. Add more lines as needed.



2. Review Social Connections Map

Part A: Different people and relationships provide different types of support. Take a look at your Social Connections Map to help answer the following questions.

Who are your most important connections right now?	_____
With whom can you share your experiences or feelings?	_____
From whom can you get advice to help with your recovery?	_____
Whom do you want to spend time with socially in the next couple of weeks?	_____
Who might be able to help you with practical tasks (errands, paperwork, homework)?	_____
Who might need your help or support right now?	_____

Part B: Write down **who or what is missing or needs to be changed** in your network. To help you decide, ask yourself: Are there types of support missing? Are there loved ones or friends with whom you wish to reconnect? Whom do you want to spend more or less time with? Are there some relationships you want to improve? Do you want to help others, but aren't sure how to go about doing it? Do you want to have more social activities? Do you want to do more for others by joining a community group?

3. Make a Social Support Plan

Now come up with a **concrete plan** for what you are going to do and when you will do it.

Put your plan into action!

Don't worry too much if it feels awkward at first or doesn't go as smoothly as you thought.

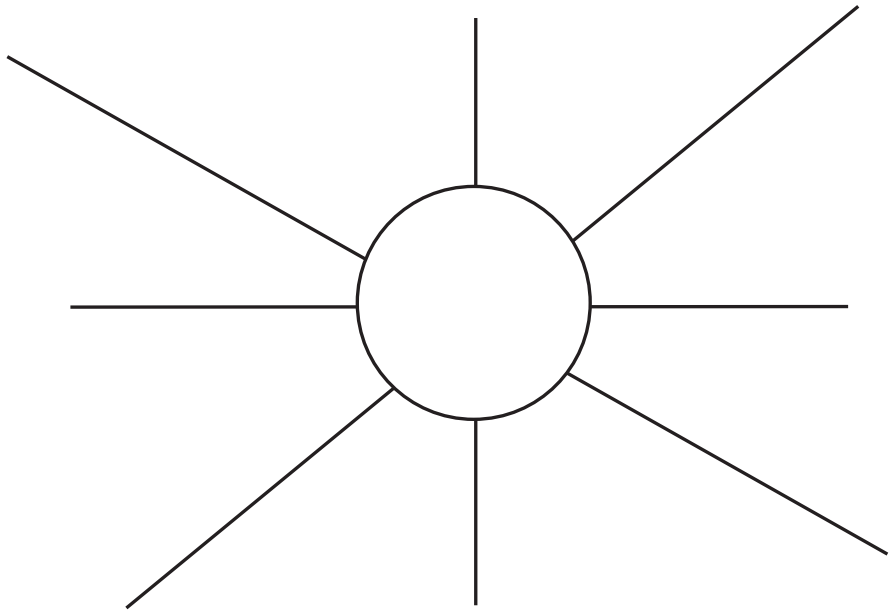
Remember, you can be flexible.

For Children: Social Connections Worksheet

Sometimes after disasters, kids can feel cut off. You may not live near your friends anymore. You may feel different from the other kids around you. Maybe your family doesn't have as much fun time together. This worksheet will help you find ways to feel closer to people.

1. Make a Social Connections Map

Write your name in the center of the circle, and then write in the names of people, pets, professionals, or groups that are part of your network. Add more lines if you need to.



2. Review Social Connections Map

Whom can you talk with about your feelings?	_____
Who can give you advice or help with problems?	_____
Whom do you want to play with?	_____
Who can help you with things such as chores or homework?	_____
Who do you want to help you feel better?	_____

Is there anything that you wish you could change about your social map?

3. Make a Social Support Plan

Now come up with a plan for what you will do and when you will do it. Keep in mind that you might need an adult's help for some of these things (such as driving you somewhere).

Put Your Plan into Action!

Don't worry too much if it feels funny at first.

It's okay if it doesn't go as smoothly as you thought.

Types of Social Support Worksheet

Name	Description	How You Get It & Give It	Need?	Can Give?
Emotional Comfort	Feeling "heard," understood, accepted, and loved or cared for	Listening (without giving advice or judgment), giving a hug or a "shoulder to cry on"	□	□
Social Belonging	Feeling as if you fit in, belong, and have things in common with other people	Spending time with friends and family members, participating in enjoyable or recreational activities with others	□	□
Feeling Needed	Feeling that you are important and valued by others	Words of appreciation or gratitude, showing someone you enjoy his/her company	□	□
Self-Worth	Feeling that you are a valuable and appreciated member of a family, group, or organization and that your contributions make a difference	Words or acts of appreciation for your skills, knowledge, talents, and contributions; being asked to help or participate; feedback that you've faced and handled challenges well	□	□
Reliable Support	Feeling that you have people you can depend on to help you if you need it	Being available to help someone when they need or ask for help	□	□
Advice, Information & Problem-Solving	Having someone who can offer good advice, show you how to do something, give you information, or mentor you	Giving information on how to obtain the service or items that one needs; helping you think of options you have or ways to fix a problem	□	□
Physical Assistance	Having people who help you to carry out physical tasks or run errands	Helping someone do something you need, such as home or car repair, paperwork	□	□
Material Assistance	Having people give you tangible assistance	Giving items such as food, clothing, medicine, building materials, or a loan	□	□

Getting Social Support in Six Steps

You will need to plan ahead in order to increase the time with and connection to your most important support people. Use these six steps to help you choose the best ways to ask support from and connect to the people you identified on your Social Connections Map.

1. **Ask: "Who are my most important social connections right now?"**
   Figure out to whom you want to connect using your Social Connections Map. Think about people with whom you want to increase (or decrease!) time.

2. **Think: "What Do I Want?"**
   Decide what you really want or need from your social connections. For example, sometimes you want to be understood and sometimes you want advice. Approach this in two ways:

   A. **Look Outside Yourself.** What kind of problem am I facing? What kind of support will help me cope? Do I have to make an important decision (and need some good advice)? Do I need someone to help me do something? Do I need something from someone?

   B. **Look Inside Yourself.** What am I feeling inside? What kind of support will help me cope? Do I want someone to listen to me and understand what I'm going through? Do I want someone to hug or hold me? Do I want encouragement in handling a difficult situation? Do I want someone to help me get my mind off my problems?

3. **Choose: "Whom Should I Ask?"**
   Who would be a good source for what I want? In the past, who has given me this type of support? On whom can I depend for this type of support? With whom should I spend time?

4. **Plan: "When Is the Right Time? Where Is the Right Place?"**
   You'll be talking about something that matters to you, so you want the person to have enough time to listen. Ask what would be the best time, and let him/her know that you were hoping for at least one hour. Make sure your meeting place is comfortable, safe, and has privacy.

5. **Request: With an "I"-Message.**
   Once you have decided on the type of support you want and whom you'll ask, and have found a good time to talk, use an "I"-message to talk about how you're feeling, your situation, and what the person listening to you can do to help. For example, you might say, "I'm really angry (upset, frustrated, sad) about what happened in school today, and wonder if we could talk about it."

6. **Thank the Person.**
   End the conversation by thanking the person for listening or for his/her help. Name exactly what he/she did that you appreciated, so in the future he/she will know how to help you.

Giving Social Support in Six Steps

Sometimes you would like to help someone, but you know it is unwise to take on their problems. It can be helpful to think about and decide what you can do that may truly help, without harming the connections you have built for yourself and your family. Use these six steps when learning to give support to others:

1. **What Kind of Problem Is the Person Facing?**
   Think carefully about the type of problem the person is facing. Is he feeling sad or discouraged? Does she need help doing something, such as repairing something that is broken? Do they need someone who can help clean something up or run an errand?
2. **What Type of Support Can I Give to Be Helpful?**
   Think through the types of support that you could give—or get others to give—that would help the person. Is it helping directly with the problem (such as helping to carry something or to fix something)? Is it helping to get his/her mind off things by going for a walk, seeing a movie, or doing something together? As you think through this, avoid taking on more than you can handle. Invite other people to join you if the problem is a difficult one.
3. **Find the Right Time.**
   Because you'll be talking to the person about something that matters to him/her, find a time to talk when he/she can listen to you ("Do you have the time to talk right now?").
4. **Find the Right Place/Space.**
   Make sure your meeting place allows your friend and you comfort, safety, and privacy. When choosing a convenient place, consider your friend's travel time.
5. **Offer to Help.**
   Once you have found a good time to talk, tell him/her that you care and you would like to help. Do not make him/her feel uncomfortable by implying that he/she isn't handling things well.
6. **Provide Help in a Sensitive Way.**
   If the person agrees to receive support, be sensitive. Pay attention to the kind of help he/she is asking for or wishes to receive, and when and how much help he/she wants. Be gracious; if he/she thanks you, then say "You are welcome."

Appendix G:
Multiple Contacts Worksheet

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Preventing Setbacks Worksheet

As you continue to practice your skills in the months ahead, remember that recovery is a gradual process and setbacks are common. During a holiday or special family occasion, missing a loved one who died may make you feel sadder. Strong feelings may be evoked, and family members may be anxious because usual routines are thrown off course. Use this worksheet to identify these difficult days and ways to cope with them.

1. **Identify "Early Warning Signs" or Difficult Days.** Write down three stressful situations or triggers (changing jobs or school, financial problems, news reports about a similar disaster, the anniversary of the event) you expect in the future.

2. **What can you do to help yourself feel better?** List the skills that will help you before, during, and after these difficult days or stressful situations.

3. **Other things to keep in mind on these difficult days:**
   - **Use your worksheets and handouts.** Review the materials to remind you of the skills you learned and what you have accomplished.
   - **Increase self-care.** Maintain healthy routines, such as normal sleeping, eating, and exercise routines.
   - **Spend time with others.** Let friends or family members know how they can be of support before, during, and after these difficult days or situations.
   - **Do fun or meaningful activities.** Distract yourself by engaging in hobbies, helping others, and participating in satisfying activities.
   - **Beware of using alcohol or drugs.** Alcohol and other drugs—while they seem to help in the short term—always make things worse in the long term.
   - **Don't be too hard on yourself.** Remember that everyone has a bad day and that "My progress is NOT all blown."
   - **Call a counselor for help.** If your reactions continue or increase, contact the program for further assistance.